

Kikiskisin Ná: Do you remember?
Utilizing Indigenous methodologies to understand the experiences of mixed-blood
Indigenous peoples in identity re-membering

by

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Abstract

A Muskego Inninuwuk methodology provided the foundation to explore experiences of individuals who possess both Indigenous (Cree) and non-Indigenous ancestry in the development of their identities. Natural conversations facilitated sitting with and listening to Cree Elders and engaging with mixed-ancestry Cree individuals about the stories of their identities. The overall goal of this research was to create a space for individuals to express the impacts of systems, relationships and the ways in which people come to understand their overall wellbeing and connection to ancestors through stories in personal identity development.

Elders shared with me stories of disconnection and intergenerational experiences that caused diversion from the natural progression of Cree identity development as impacts of colonization. From this they also shared their stories of re-connection and healing. Common experiences expressed by mixed-blood Cree participants highlighted the impact of colonization on their understanding and expression of themselves as individuals and as members of larger community, the complexity that underlies their experiences of identity, and how their understanding of wellbeing is connected to healing. Stories shared processes of healing, decolonization and resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in reclamation of self.

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Dedication

To my children, Parker, Caelie and Cassidy Rowe. Everyday you reconnect me with the beauty that lies all around us. You teach me again everyday to laugh, to dance, and to experience every moment in life. You are the exquisite gifts given to your papa and I to love, to nurture, and to learn from.

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Chapter One - Thesis Overview

(M)ixed-blood Native people are not extraneous to Indigenous communities...they represent the other half of a history of colonization, the children and grandchildren of people removed, dispersed, and continuously bled off from native communities as a result of ongoing colonization policies- residential schooling, termination and relocation, the theft of Native children into the child welfare system, and a century of removing Indian status from Native women and their descendents. (Lawrence, 2004, p. 14)

Tansi. I am a Muskego Innineew Iskwew (Swampy Cree woman) of mixed ancestry and a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. Who am I? I ask myself this question and re-ask myself this question. I sit with it for a while and wonder if I will ever be done thinking and wondering. I am not sure. But there are some things that I do know to be true about me. My given names are Gladys Lorene. I was named after my maternal and paternal grandmothers. When I was younger I didn't like the name Gladys very much. It seemed old, too old for a little girl. It seemed like it was from an ancient time and kids would make fun of me for my name. But as I have grown I have come to cherish that I carry the names of my grandmothers and I honour the significance of this. And so I wear my names with pride as within them, and within my heart, I am connected eternally to these strong, powerful, and vibrant women.

My mother is Debbie Lynn Anderson and my father is Michael Charles Lawrenchuk. I am a mother of three beautiful children. I am a wife, sister, niece, auntie, cousin, daughter and granddaughter. Through this introduction – I begin to give you some understanding of who I am. This introduction is an important part of situating myself in relation to everyone and everything around me. This allows for people to begin to locate me in relation to my ancestors. My identity has shifted through my personal journey. Processes of healing and decolonization have allowed for my development as a

Muskego Inninew Iskwew with mixed ancestry to lead to a space of reconnection and resurgence.

Niezen (2009) suggests “the term “identity” might reasonably be used to capture the historical distinctiveness of the age in which we live” (p. 3). Processes of self-discovery necessitate uncovering who we are in relation to those around as integral developmental journeys. No longer is identity development seen as a discrete age based outcome; rather, it is a journey within which our overall wellbeing is intricately linked (Niezen, 2009). We, as individuals, come to understand who we are through our personal, familial and community histories.

Identity can be seen as both inclusive and exclusive: inclusive in the way that we belong to and are claimed by the groups that we identify with; and exclusive at the same time in the way that we are not members of groups and are not claimed in membership. In this paradoxical account, identity is then boundary building where the qualities by which an individual draws belonging in individual and collective identity also works to exclude those who are not the same and therefore do not share this identity and are ‘others’ (Niezen, 2009). In particular this is of concern to this project in the way that legislation and social policy has served to define who is and who is not First Nation or status Indian in Canada. This will be discussed in detail in later chapters. Ideals of collective justice, politically asserted rights to territory, citizenship and nationhood are intricately bound within group identity recognition (Niezen, 2009). Individual identity contexts are highly relational and therefore perpetually influenced by structures and relationships within which we live our everyday lives.

Identity is a lifelong journey, where the development of our understanding of self in relation to everyone and everything around us continually informs how we assert who we are. This is the way that we answer the question: “who am I?” There are multiple layers to identity. The way that we define our personal identity can be connected to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, cultures and prescribed and ascribed roles for example. For the purpose of this project, identity will be examined in relation to the relational nature of answering the question of “who am I” including internal and external influences specifically related to individuals who possess a mixed ancestry of Cree and non-Indigenous identities. Hilary Weaver (2001) indicates the complexity when we begin to unravel the layers of Indigenous identity:

Indigenous identity is a truly complex and somewhat controversial topic. There is little agreement on precisely what constitutes an indigenous identity, how to measure it, and who truly has it. Indeed, there is not even a consensus on appropriate terms. Are we talking about Indians, American Indians, Natives, Native-Americans, indigenous people? Are we talking about Sioux or Lakota? Navajo or Dine? Chippewa, Ojibwa, or Anishinabe? Once we get that sorted out are we talking about race, ethnicity, cultural identity, tribal identity, acculturation, enculturation, bicultural identity, multicultural identity, or some other form of identity? (p. 240)

The British and Canadian states have created for Indigenous peoples a web of colonization that has become intertwined in our everyday lives. This has impacted identity through disconnection from ancestors, language, community, belonging and family who provide the roots of identity itself. Additionally internal colonization impacts identity through devastating degradation and self-condemnation. Colonization is alive and well today and is evident in social institutions such as education and child welfare systems, government legislation, and social policies which continue to perpetuate exclusion and distrust. One social institution of particular interest in this thesis is social

work. The foundation of the profession of social work was founded upon Eurocentric values that privilege western ways of knowing, being and doing within its very core.

Yellow Bird and Gray (2008) argue:

Social work was formed on a foundation of colonization and exclusion of the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and is, therefore, not significantly different in its assumptions and protections of the colonial *status quo* than other mainstream organizations or institutions that maintain the interests of the colonial state. (p. 64)

Each Canadian social institution potentially impacts an individual's ability to explore the roots and meanings of Indigenous identity and the possibility of reclaiming Indigenous personhood.

As a process of discovery, coming to know who we are as individuals in relationship with our Indigenous and non-Indigenous family histories involves remembering and reclaiming the stories of our ancestors and communities. These stories can potentially serve as catalysts to undo the disconnection perpetuated through colonialism. This reclamation could also include the ways in which our non-Indigenous self is potentially included or excluded from this identity expression.

Identity is the development of our understanding of self in relation to everyone and everything around us. Identity is the way that we answer the question: "who am I?" It is a search for a place to belong, to connect to those around us in a way that can provide safety and meaning in how we understand who we are. Individual's search for belonging, membership, and ultimately connection is a natural human desire linked to wellbeing and health.

My research will explore the potential of stories, personal stories and those stories of our ancestors, to reconnect us with our essential and authentic selves. I will explore the role of stories and relationships in the experiences of identities of mixed-blood Cree

individuals and the way that stories have been used as mechanisms for healing. The importance of such an undertaking on personal, familial and communal health and wellbeing can be articulated through Anishinabe Elder Art Solomon's words:

In order to know where we are going we need to know where we are; to know where we are, we need to know who we are; to know who we are, we need to know where we come from. (Absolon, n.d.)

Background

Formation of identity is an internal and external process influenced by social and familial environments, community history and involvement (Weaver, 2001), life stage and significant life events (Erikson, 1950; Hall, 1990), and cultural and ethnic affiliations (Mihesuah, 1998; Niezan, 2009). Individual development is supported through our interactions with people around us, the environment, and the way in which we make sense of these interactions internally. From an Indigenous understanding, this process is relational and continual (Hart, 2002). We are in relation with everything around us. We are both influenced and influencing (Anderson, 2000; Simpson, 2011). For Indigenous peoples formation of identity has been disrupted by intergenerational impacts of colonization, disconnection and separation from language, family, community, history, and land (Anderson, 2000; Hart, 2002; Alfred, 1999, Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Experience of trauma due to colonization has severed critical relationships and has had personal, familial, and communal ramifications on the ability to build and maintain strong healthy identities (Kirmayer, Brass & Tait, 2000; Lansdowne, 2009; Lawrence, 2003; Leslie, 2003). Plagued by the *Indian Act*, current political, social, and economic divisions are rooted largely within colonial interference upon traditional ways of transmitting knowledges, languages and identities (Lawrence, 2003; Palmater, 2011). This

disconnection is at the root of many issues faced by Indigenous peoples. Through processes aimed at reconnection it is possible to begin a journey of healing (Hart, 2002).

Personal searches for belonging, membership and ultimately connection are intertwined within struggles for power, acceptance, recognition, and healing or growth. A colonial residue overshadows experiences of Indigenous identities. King (2011) highlights measurements and contortions of membership that Indigenous individuals are subject to:

Yet in the absence of visual confirmation, these ‘touchstones’ – race, language, blood – still form a kind of authenticity test, a racial-reality game that contemporary Native people are forced to play. And here are some of the questions. Were you born on a reserve? Small rural towns with high Native populations will do. Cities will not. Do you speak your Native language? Not a few phrases here and there. Fluency is the key. No fluency, no Indian. Do you participate in your tribe’s ceremonies? Being a singer or dancer is a plus, but not absolutely required. Are you a full-blood? Are you a status Indian? Are you enrolled? (p. 43)

External indicators such as stereotypes perpetuated through powerful dominant society have been barriers for many who are working to undo the internal damage. As individuals collectively move to reject and heal from the commonly defined stereotypes, it supports the potential of collective rediscovery. Re-articulation of collective belonging can work to counteract the abuses of colonial domination towards collective healing (Niezen, 2009).

Given described internal and external forces, what are the experiences of individuals working to understand themselves in relation to their heritage and life history enclosed within the parameters and contexts described above? Have these contexts actually influenced an individual’s search and assertion of this? How do these individuals make sense of these environments and from this articulate an identity?

Statement of the Problem

A movement of reclamation, healing and reconciliation has sparked conversations whereby generations of Indigenous peoples in Canada have begun to explore, among other healing aspects, what their identity means to them (Corntassel, 2003; Lansdowne, 2009; Lawrence, 2004; Leslie, 2003; Palmater, 2011). However, there remains a gap in the academic literature that moves the conversation of Indigenous identity beyond ‘who has it’ and ‘how to get it’ which only serves to further the limiting definitional and essentialist endpoint (Leslie, 2003).

Bonita Lawrence, an Indigenous academic in Canada who has worked to address this gap (2004), explored experiences of mixed-blood urban Indigenous individuals in relation to systemic and colonial constraints on identity. Struggles of participants to negotiate highly complex scenarios included internalizing and/or resisting measurements of authenticity based on legal categories, land based community ties, levels of whiteness of skin, and living on government recognized spaces of Indianness. These experiences highlighted the ambiguity of both marginality and privilege. Internalized racism within family histories exposed gradations of assimilation and attempts to erase this history and to embrace the white cultural supremacies in order to blend in (Lawrence, 2004). Experiences of double identity and mixed race raised questions about whether belonging, cohesiveness, and acceptance necessarily hinged upon the ability to regain legal status. It is evident that the negotiation of internal assumptions and external standards about what Indigenous identity is and who has it can be a difficult, emotional, and yet, essential process for individuals.

Identity experiences and how we make sense of who we are is a deeply intuitive and personal process that involves reconnecting and nurturing relationships (Anderson, 2000; Palmater, 2011). Answers to questions of who we are and how we are connected lie within our selves, our families and our communities. Working back through our personal life experiences, reconnecting and engaging we can begin to *re-member*, and uncover who we are and the gifts we possess (Hill, as cited in Anderson, 2000). Decolonization, as a personal journey, necessitates that we understand how we are related to our history, family, community and nation. We can begin to uncover the ways that we are related and connected through sharing of stories, both personal and ancestral. From this we can begin to repair connections and rethread the fabric of who we are.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to create a space for individuals who possess both Cree and non-Indigenous ancestry to share their experiences of engaging and connecting with their identity. This will include the way in which they discover, seek out and come to understand themselves in relation to their heritage. This project will utilize Indigenous methodologies as a foundation for this search.

Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past... It is only from this... position that we can properly understand the traumatic character of ‘the colonial experience’. (Hall, 1990, p.233)

Indigenous peoples in Canada are dynamic and diverse and vary in processes of re-visioning and retrieving the pieces of who we are as recovery from colonial processes. Absolon and Willett (2005) indicate that this is a time of “pulling ourselves together” (p.112) where awareness and expression of self-location are central to this rebuilding.

The fluidity and our articulation of our location will vary as we walk through the recovery process, examining past and present experiences and incorporating revised awarenesses, understandings and knowledges into our location.

It is possible that through expression of personal stories of who we are, of the relational nature of our identities and ways of being, reconnecting and re-membering, we are able to move towards mino-pimatisiwin (Hart, 2002). Mino-pimatisiwin can be expressed as the “overall goal of healing, learning, and life in general” (Hart, 2002, p. 44). This can also be linked to personal journeys of decolonization (Kovach, 2010) which moves beyond identifying colonial impact and seeks change.

I describe and utilize a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology specifically privileging and drawing from Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, relational accountability, and mino-pimatisiwin. Wilson (2008) indicates the interconnected and interdependent composition of an Indigenous research paradigm,

I believe that Indigenous epistemology and ontology are based on relationality. Our axiology and methodology are based upon maintaining relational accountability. With a deeper understanding of these concepts, I hope that you will come to see that research is a ceremony. The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous peoples is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. (p.11)

A Muskego Inninuwuk methodology expresses a mechanism to gain further insight into our responsibility to maintain balance with Niwâkomâkanak (All my relations, i.e. all of creation) and honour the connection and fluidity between all aspects of self (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual) and self in relation towards personal decolonization (Hart, 2002). Mino-pimatisiwin, achieved through attention and development of wholeness, connection, harmony, balance, growth and healing (Hart, 2002) can also offer

insight into the journey of mixed-ancestry Indigenous individuals and the expression, remembering and reclamation of identity.

Primary Research Questions

In order to move towards the overall goal of this project the following questions were explored:

1. How do individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry experience their identities?
 - a. How have experiences of identities changed or developed?
 - b. What mechanisms have impacted this development?
2. How do the concepts of Niwâkomâkanak (all my relations) and mino-pimatisiwin (the good life) influence the development of identity?

Answering these interrelated questions can provide insight into experiences of individuals who are coming to understand and relate to their locations as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples including the ways in which their relations have informed, supported or consciously or unconsciously built barriers to personal wellbeing and decolonization processes.

The overall goal of this research is to create a space for voices not currently included in the literature to express the impacts of systems, relationships and the ways in which people come to understand mino-pimatisiwin (the good life) and Niwâkomâkanak (all my relations) in personal identity development and wellbeing.

In seeking out these experiences and stories, while sharing similarities as a researcher, I must also acknowledge that they are also based upon layers of context and variability with relations and situations. This project does not seek to generalize

participants' stories, but rather create space and avenues for sharing points of connection, relationship and understanding of experiences.

Importance of the Study

As Smith (1999) suggests, self-determination within an Indigenous research agenda encompasses much more than political aspirations. Rather, the aim becomes a matter of social justice juxtaposed against processes of transformation, decolonization, healing, and mobilization of peoples. This purpose is intricately bound to both my head and my heart as I am accountable to not only myself, but also my family and my community (Kovach, 2010). This deeply intimate project speaks to my personal journey with identity, belonging, membership, connection and meaning, constantly working to balance the differing aspects of self and self-in-relation to others.

Awareness, evolution and articulation of my identities have filtered through my internal dialogues and searching for most of my life as I come to know more about the purpose of my life's work. This truly is a life journey where I have consistently reflected upon, sought to re-member, and to re-examine my experiences with and expressions of my identities. Increasingly, as my awareness grows, so too does my commitment to re-engaging and re-membering as a Muskego Inninew Iskwew (Swampy Cree woman). My processes move towards attempting to understand how both aspects of my ancestry – Indigenous and non-Indigenous have worked to create the person I am today, and to understand how all of my experiences can inform and propel my own personal decolonization. This is also a journey driven by my children as they begin to explore who they are in relation to the spaces and people around them. As a mother I carry a great

responsibility to ensure that I provide the knowledges and roots upon which they will be able to understand their connections and places of belonging.

Throughout the development of my proposal for the completion of my Master of Social Work program I journeyed through several qualitative research topics all rooted within my ever-expanding Indigenous understandings of my interconnected place and space in the work that I do. I would come to the point that necessarily required me to locate myself within the project. I would become stuck in this section – the why me, why this question, why this methodology. Initially I would articulate my Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) roots, singularly focused, determined to recapture a sense of self that had been removed and displaced from my reach. This was a method of reasserting power and control over who I am and how I am connected to the roots of my father, the lands of my granny Gladys Moose and my Northern Manitoba community. As I moved through my personal commitment towards decolonization, building awareness, connecting and building relationships, a nagging question would come up for me – what about my other pieces? What about my mother, my aunts and my grandmother? These strong women raised, formed, and guided me into womanhood –are not Cree. How do I balance these pieces of myself to honour these women in my life? How do I articulate these pieces of my whole being in a manner that does not cause questions of authenticity in one world, but at the same time lead to denouncing the experiences of another. Each time these questions were never quite settled. I found I could never quite fit comfortably into the work that I was attempting. I knew with this that I had inherently found my exploration; or more accurately, my journey found me, and would continue to remind me through my dreams. I work to accept to the knowledges gifted to me in my dreams, although I would

not always understand what was being shared. As I came to a deeper understanding of the importance of intuitive ways of knowing, I have come to honour the gifts that I have been given through my dreams. In these dreams I would be given direction, information, and guidance that would let me know that I certainly had found the answer to my ‘why this question, why me and why Indigenous methodologies’? This intuitive process has largely guided my journey and it is through my dreams that I have received affirmation about the necessity of my movement with this topic. It is truly a deeply personal, transformative, decolonizing and healing journey.

The past, present, and future intersect and much of our research is about searching for truth, freedom, emancipation, and ultimately finding our way home. Finding our way home is a search to return to our own roots, dignity, and humanity as the Creator originally intended. So one path many of us choose is emancipation through research and knowledge. Many of us understand that knowledge is power and our search for knowledge constitutes a search for power. Indigenous research is about being personal and political and responsible for creating change. (Absolon, 2008, p.103)

In the journey of my life so far, I have connected with people who, like me, have been asking these same questions, journeying along similar paths. We have connected, conversed, questioned, and attempted to come to an understanding about what the possession of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestries means for each of us. This is an experience that touches the lives of many people I have met and it is for these reasons I hope that the experiences I seek to explore in this project will also touch the lives of many others as they possibly engage with similar questions and tensions in the search for balance. As McIvor (2010) suggests, while this is my unique story, this is also a generational story of us who have lost our language, feel lost without our connections to land, without our connections to the teachings of our grandmothers, and because of these disconnections feel we may not have something important to offer. But in spite of, or

perhaps because of this, we have not lost hope and have begun to re-member these connections. These are our stories.

Strategies of inquiry

The way that we come to know about the subject is informed through our stance in the world, the way we view the world, and what we believe to be true (Wilson, 2008). Within this project, value is placed on both process of doing research as well as content. The process of this project rests largely upon relational accountability. This honours knowledges gained from the participants and the space that is created as a result of the relationship between storyteller and listener. In the development of this project a Muskego Inninuuk methodology centers Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing.

From an Indigenous foundation of knowing, being and doing based on relational accountability and understanding the journey of *mino pimatisiwin*, strategies of inquiry undertaken for this project include inner knowing, self-location, stories and natural conversations, and journaling.

Inner knowing. For this project, the preparations of myself as the researcher within a Muskego Inninuuk methodology are key to upholding Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This reflects the experiential, process centered and inward reflecting and knowing that comes with personal experience. Ermine (1995) asserts that the richest source of knowledge can be found within oneself. “Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self” (Ermine, 1995, p. 108).

Inward reflection is centered within a Muskego Inninuuk methodology because of the value placed on this type of knowing (Kovach, 2010). Attention to inward knowing

is supported through seeking out Elders and participating in cultural catalyst activities (dream, ceremony, prayer) as means of access (Kovach, 2010). Dreams, as a catalyst activity for attaining access to inner space are so invaluable that the external environment is often manipulated in order that dreams might happen (Ermine, 1995). The foundational importance for understanding of these experiences is based on a Cree concept described by Ermine (1995):

Mamatowan refers not just to the self but to the being in connection with happenings. It also recognizes that other life forms manifest the creative force in the context of the knower. It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge. (p. 104)

Throughout the development and implementation of this project, I continue to learn about the ways in which to incorporate spirit and inner knowings into all aspects of my life. For the direction of this thesis, for example, I have acknowledged, honoured, and incorporated knowledges coming to me from dreams, happenings, and meditation within my everyday. Preparations included offering tobacco at various times throughout my journey, asking for guidance in particular areas, and to give thanks for the knowledges shared with me at different points in time. This also included smudging and utilizing sacred medicines for myself. At times when I was stuck, blocked or needed to clear the space around me, this also included my house, my office and my computer.

These catalyst activities, dreams, ceremony, and prayer, have been critical to the development, to the implementation, and to the completion of this research including participant selection and meaning making. Inner knowing that has come as a result of dreams and day visions have influenced direction that this research has taken. For example, the impetus behind this project has come from being re-directed from original

intentions to complete research that centered on other goals. I had completed literature reviews for several other thesis proposals until each time I came to a point of stagnation. Something didn't feel right about it. Rationally they made sense, and I had support to complete each of the outlined projects, but it was not what I was meant to be working on and this came through in my dreams. At each of these instances I was given dreams that directed me. In one dream I had missed a flight that was asking me to change a piece of my body to be able to take the flight and was re-routed through New Zealand where this request to change my self was not necessary. In another dream I was buying a house that looked complete and like everything I wanted, but the door to the back room opened up to an abyss of fire and jagged rock, stubborn even in my dreams I decided it was fixable and moved my family in. During the first night we were chased from the house by a monster. I was being directed over and over again through the stagnation in my writing and through my dreams I would need to focus on something different.

When I had settled on the area of identity for mixed-ancestry Cree people, although it was uncomfortable, because it was so personal, I knew I had to undertake this search for exactly that same reason. It only made sense for what I was being shown in my dreams. As I set out on this journey, my dreams would reinforce this direction. During the time when I was preparing to write my proposal for this research I had this dream:

I dreamt I was a tour guide in an old building, likely built in the 1800's. There were many levels and stairs, it was dark and musty, there were cobwebs and it was largely uninhabited. I was walking through the hallways with a lantern in my hand and I was guiding a group of people through my life. The only other people in the building were ghosts, people who made up my past, those who created me and impacted my life, ancestors, mentors, and peers. I was touring the group through my life, through my past, through the people who made me who I am. It was a healing process in my dream: it wasn't difficult or emotional it was necessary. Those within the building were like artifacts in a museum, memories held on within my own being. (Rowe, July 15, 2012)

I would like to note, that while I now speak about dreaming experiences and accessing inner knowing as if it has been something that has come naturally to me: this could not be farther from the truth. Throughout my lifetime there have been numerous instances where I have been given knowledge or direction through my dreams, or other catalyst activities; but I would shrug it off as coincidence, question the validity of what was being shown to me. These reactions are as a direct result of disconnection. However, as I came to question my reactions I would pay more attention to what was being shown. I noticed I would experience qualitatively different dreams and I started to talk about them with the people around me.

I became more curious about the occurrence of this vivid dreaming. In speaking with Elders I came to understand the importance of listening to what was being shared. I came to understand that this was an important way of coming to know that I needed to present within my research. I incorporated inner knowing occurred through times of meditation and thinking deeply about myself in relation to my project, about the work that I was completing; looking for guidance, I created space for myself to complete this work. At dream times I would be aware of the content, feelings and meaning connected to the dreams that were given to me. During the times that it was connected to my thesis, I would record, share with trusted individuals, speak out loud and undertake a process of thinking deeply about the knowledges that were shared. Sometimes I would be able to decipher the meaning and what the dreams were showing me; other times, although I felt like it was important, I would not be able to understand what was being shown to me. And so I would let it sit; I would sit with it. There are dreams that only now, after a couple of years, are beginning to make sense within my learning and healing journeys.

For example, at one point when I was particularly struggling and questioning my ability to finish writing my thesis proposal, I was given the gift of the following dream:

I had a beautiful dream last night that I know I needed to write down in order to capture this in my research process. It is clearly linked and has given me some strength to move forward. There are a few elements that stick with me now as I write.

I am in a school, I am navigating my way through the hallways and I know my way around. I am happy to be there and I feel like I belong. I am moving fluidly through the halls, greeting the people – but I am looking for something. I am not sure what it is I am looking for. I look down and I notice I am holding a young baby – under 3 months for certain. I am in love with this baby, I adore her – I think it is a girl – but I am not sure. I am nurturing and caring for the baby. I breastfeed the baby and it is the most beautiful feeling in the dream. It makes me feel so happy to connect with this baby in this way and I feel that the baby is happy and growing from my feeding her.

I woke up with the most beautiful warm, happy and loving feeling. (Rowe, September 30, 2012)

I was given the gift of this dream – not only to offer encouragement and to remind me that this work I am doing is meaningful to me for a reason – for it comes from me. It is founded upon an idea that is so intimately connected with me, I must nurture it and that is my responsibility in this project. I am responsible for this work and it drives me to move forward. For me this is a foundational way of connecting to not only spirit, but to the essence of who I am.

The dreams of pregnancy and a baby have occurred consistently in this undertaking for me. They have nudged me forward and have given me strength in times of self-doubt and apprehension. Internalized colonization, discussed by participants and within the literature examined in later chapters is not something that I have escaped within my own healing. It still rears its ugly head through self-doubt, questioning, resistance, lack of confidence in my abilities, lack of belief in self worth and value. To be

able to express my voice and know that I have something meaningful to share is not without struggle. It threatens to immobilize me as I engage in an internal struggle. This has been one of the greatest personal challenges in completing a Master thesis. I am far from being freed of the impacts of colonization, but I can say that in completing this work I have progressed. The dreams of a child, of being pregnant, are important indicators that I am healing and working on my own personal resurgence.

At another point in time when I was nearing the end of writing my thesis, I was feeling very anxious. There was a great deal going on for me and I was struggling to handle the emotions that came along with delving into my own personal experiences of identity as I was concurrently transcribing and thinking deeply about the stories of participants. I was concerned about honouring, respecting, and sharing their stories in a good way. Caught in these spots and with the deadlines looming I was feeling the pressure. There were a couple of weeks that this pressure reflected in all of my dreams, it seemed I could not get any rest from the demands.

Through this I continued to work, to process, and to think deeply about the stories: I was deep into meaning making. Then a beautiful dream came to me, I was comforted and supported by my mentor in this dream. He let me know that everything was going to be okay, that I was strong and I was going to make it through. When I shared this with my thesis advisor, he stated that I must be near the end of my thesis writing (personal communication, June, 2013). In this way I was being told that I had completed what I needed to for this project and I could bring to conclusion what I had been writing about.

For me this journey has been a matter of trusting my own self, the knowing that lies within that can be accessed through dreams, visions, and ceremonies. It is a matter of accessing this knowing with intention: creating space for the catalysts to knowledge gathering to occur and internalizing the meaning being shared. This meant clearing my space internally and externally with intention. Through my own healing, decolonization and resurgence I have learned that this is not only a credible means of accessing knowledge, perhaps, it is one of the most critical ways as Indigenous peoples we will come to know, to facilitate further healing, decolonization and resurgence.

One of the necessary steps to move this inward knowing coming from my dreaming into praxis is in the sharing of these knowledges with broader communities. The synthesizing of this knowledge is encoded and embedded within community action and awareness. Ermine (1995) describes the community as a repository within which to hold and transmit from one generation to the next the accumulation of this knowledge, providing a foundation for further exploration through inner spaces and subjective knowledges. This has nurtured within successive generations a lure to inwardness where introspection can provide meaning for contemporary Indigenous peoples. Ermine (1995) indicates:

The language of the people provides another valuable indication of inner space. The word for 'mystery' usually refers to a higher power and also connotes our own deeper selves as a humble connection with the higher mystery. In conceptualizing this existence of 'ponderable' mysteries, our languages reveal a very high level of rationality that can only come from an earlier insight into power. Our languages suggest inwardness, where real power lies. It is this space within the individual that, for the Aboriginal, has become the last great frontier and the most challenging one of all. (p. 108)

My work responsibility and work for this thesis has not come to an end now that I have completed this research and have written it up within this thesis. I have only begun to

fulfill my responsibilities to the knowledges shared through my inner knowings, through the stories of the participants, and through the meaning making that has come from thinking deeply about what was shared. I will take these knowledges and meanings back to participants, and back to community to continue the work that has been built with the establishment of these relationships and the sharing of these stories.

Self-location. One of the responsibilities that I undertake through personal preparations for engaging in research includes processes of locating my self, that is sharing with participants my stories, my experiences, who I am and where I come from. This process is integral to ethical Indigenous methods of inquiry and allow for transparency (Kovach, 2010). Location speaks to the relational foundation of Indigenous worldview and knowledges. In revealing and sharing my identity with others I am revealing my intentions and investment in this project (Absolon & Willet, 2005). This also includes the responsibility that comes with creating a relational space within which to engage in this work. It is part of acknowledging the responsibility that comes with carrying another's story, and that in these experiences I will work to honour and maintain this responsibility in a good way.

For example in sharing my story, in coming to know me, you will begin to know of my family, and of the strengths and gifts that my family has given me. Through the struggles there has been growth and beauty. In retrospect the journey of my parents, together and separate have provided me the opportunity to reflect on my identity in relation to theirs, and what this means for me today in all the pieces that make me who I am.

I was thinking about the gifts that have been given to me through my family. Without these gifts, these teachings I would not have developed into the core of what makes me Gladys. My mother, one of the strong women in my life. She raised my brother and I with such strength and determination. From her I learned about the responsibility of taking care of your children, she did anything she could to make sure my brother Michael and I had everything we needed. As a single mother she had to be everything for us. She taught me hard work and determination. I have also learned from my mom that individual strength cannot always get you through in one piece. You need to be connected, you need to have supports and relationships, you need people around you who you can turn to.

I learned from my father to dream. He had and still has big dreams. Dreams that defy expectations and boxes, dreams that expand beyond what seems manageable. No matter if they are attainable at that time or not, not to make that judgment, but to embrace the dreams and possibilities. Dreaming is something my father excels at. He taught me through the stories that he shares that there is a greater world out there, and the wonder of that world. (Rowe, March 11, 2011).

The personal stories that hold keys to my healing journey, the journey that I am on that strengthens my understanding of myself as a Muskego Inninew Iskwew, these pieces of me I share, so that we can begin a conversation, and perhaps that conversation can be a catalyst or a mechanism of growth as well. This allows participants insight into my motivation into the topic itself, and begins the relationship necessary for story-based methodology (Kovach, 2010).

A note about the term “colonization”

Using the word colonization lays a foundation: whether based on knowledge or assumptions. This can either create a common understanding to move forward, or can be a brick wall, halting further opportunity for dialogue. The term colonization is a loaded word that can cause personal reactions. In light of this and to counter individuals “turning off”, it could be desirable to find an equivalent term that may be of less likely to create an adversarial relationship. A definition of colonization is as follows:

A process of conquest whereby one nation establishes a colony in another nation’s territory with the intent of taking power, land, and resources. European

colonialism dates from the fifteenth century onwards, and involved the brutal establishment of European sovereignty on stolen non-European territory. Colonialism is not only about material accumulation but requires the production of ideologies that justify the theft and violent practices at its root. (Said, 1979; 1994 as cited in Cannon & Sunseri, 2011, p. 275)

In order to subdue the colonized peoples, cultural annihilation is undertaken through: disconnecting of cultural patterns; stripping, crushing, and emptying of cultural values; and as an attempt to control and reap economic benefit the colonizing people attempt to ‘civilize’ and dismantle the Indigenous cultures and replace them with their own (Memmi, 1965).

In searching for another term I considered assimilation, marginalization, and oppression. Each of these is also experienced and adds to the complexity of colonization. I am not completely convinced they articulate the system and structure of colonization. It would be similarly as gargantuan an undertaking if I were asked to find another term to be substituted for the Holocaust or genocide.

In a conversation I had with doctoral candidate Liz Carlson, whose work centers on white settlers and decolonization, she indicated that there is a larger question at play, that being, who is “turning off” when they hear the word colonization, and why (personal communication, August 11, 2013). I argue, that if people truly understood the meaning of colonization, and the resulting implications in the lives of individuals, families, and communities, “turning off” would not likely be a first response. No other term that I know at this point in time would adequately describe these experiences. Perhaps this will evolve or it may exist somewhere out of my reach in this moment; it is entirely possible. It is a conversation I know I will continue to have now that the suggestion has been raised.

Based on this I also argue that coming to this point of understanding and knowledge requires formation and accountability to relationship. It is from this relationship that “turning off” would no longer be an option. Rather, people would come to hear and respect the experiences being shared for what they truly are. I will use the example of classrooms that I have taught within in the last five years. Each semester we begin with learning about theories of colonization. I have come to recognize physical, mental and emotional reactions that occur within the classroom. This can come from discomfort, fear, anger, or feeling that they know enough or have heard enough. What I have learned is that it takes the development of relationship to move a classroom of students beyond such initial reactions. Relationships are built between students, the instructor, the theories being presented, and community realities. Overwhelmingly within these classrooms by the end of the semester, relationships, respect and trust are built that allow the vulnerability to examine selves in relation to experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Summary

The following chapters will outline in detail the development and processes involved in the implementation of this project. I will explore the complexities of identity through natural conversations with mixed-blood Cree individuals and listening to stories shared by Cree Elders about what this means for our personal wellbeing. This is an intimate exploration of what it means to belong, to be connected, and to be claimed by others around you in a way that supports personal wellbeing and growth. The experiential concepts of connection and disconnection are an undertow of my exploration, as shared in this journal entry:

We are living in an age that is so globalized that individuals feel connected at some level to the world around them but at the same instant disconnected from those seemingly close to us – those from whom we were borne. Our families.
(Rowe, December 4, 2012)

My personal journey in the engagement of this process has not been an easy one. It has been a struggle that has forced me to examine my own experiences of internal oppression and historical traumas that remain within my understanding of my own identity and dis/connection.

The next chapter will provide an overview of current academic literature around the development of mixed-blood Indigenous identity in Canada. It will present a historical foundation to begin to understand the context within which mixed-blood Indigenous identity development is framed.

Chapter Two – Literature Review

Introduction

This project seeks to understand experiences that influence development and assertion of identity of mixed blood Indigenous individuals. Identity development is undertaken as people seek to understand their place in the world and develop a unique sense of self (Rummens, 2000). Identity is influenced by multiple factors including social and familial environments, community history and involvement, and significant life events (Erikson, 1950; Hall, 2001). Additional factors include place of birth, migration, economic forces, language, history, culture, education, religion, racism, and larger society (Rummens, 2000). Cultural and ethnic affiliations explicitly and implicitly influence the experience and development of identity and personhood (Miheisah, 1998; Niezan, 2009). Identity is a relationally developed, contextual process (Rummens, 2000). We come to know about the world, about who we are, and about our place in the world through not only our inner space but also through interactions with our external environments, and people around us.

Within social science literature terms used to describe these experiences include social identity, personal identity, cultural identity, racial identity, group identity, ethnic identity, and self-concept (Rummens, 2000). Types of identity, identity process, inter-group dynamics and the politics of identity are all areas of particular concern when considering experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in Canada. Relationally, this involves recognition of a common origin or shared history including characteristics shared with another person, group or ideal (Weaver, 2001). “History provides groups not only with a platform for mutual affinity, but also with a sense of collective meaning-

making about who they are, where they came from, and what future direction they should take” (Wexler, 2009, p. 269).

Currently, Canadian society is flush with varying responses and opinions as to the question of Indigenous identity. More than a personal matter, it is weighed in on by governments, media, public opinion, social institutions such as education systems and social work, and by strangers we may have not ever met. Personal assertions of identity are influenced and supported by generations of ancestors, including a shared history of belonging and membership. Concurrently personal assertions of identity are complicated by racism, colonization, internal oppression and legislated extinction of variation. Identity is a social product, created and maintained, shaped and reshaped, lost and regained (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012). We are sensitive to the image we believe others have of us, to reactions of other people, “identity is a fragile concept – temporal, situational, and constrained, and defined by those we encounter on a day-to-day basis” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012, p. 26). Identity is seen as negotiable, varying through time and contexts, “not a property of individuals but of social relationships” (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012, p. 26). This collective memory can help individuals locate themselves within larger contexts and places them in relation to their community and in the world (Wexler, 2009). Considering the complexities within a mixed ancestry Indigenous individual’s experience of identity in Canada, it is important to examine the literature outlining identity development processes and factors influencing development and subsequent experiences.

This chapter includes a review of the current published literature as well as an assessment of utility in developing an understanding of identity formation in mixed blood Indigenous individuals. Areas explored include mainstream life-stage based identity

development theories, racial and cultural identity development, and bi-racial and bi-cultural identity development theories. While there is not an overarching Indigenous identity development theory from which to draw the foundation of this study, many Indigenous authors have explored factors influencing the ability to form, claim, reclaim or possess membership of an Indigenous identity within the Canadian context. Factors addressed by Indigenous authors include the role of history, legislated identity, power and questions of authenticity. An exploration of connection, disconnection from relationships to ancestors, community, language and land all are described as influencing the development and strengthening of Indigenous identity. Additional factors discussed include individual attributes such as lightness or darkness of skin, stereotypes, the mythical portrait and internalized colonization. These Indigenous authors have provided the greatest insight and most meaningful platform from which to come to understand experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Colonization as a structure has been given considerable incorporation in the development of this project as it continues to impact the everyday lives and experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples. The impact of which is magnified by social institutions, policies and programming that continues to perpetuate this colonization. Social work continues to maintain these structures through development that is based upon mainstream understandings of identity and a disconnected view of well-being. This chapter will explore this literature, specifically examining applicability to mixed-blood Indigenous identity experiences.

Theories of identity development

This section will explore published literature related to identity development. Mainstream life stage, racial identity, biracial identity, bicultural identity, and hybridity will be examined and key areas will be highlighted.

Mainstream life stage development theories

Mainstream identity development theories typically fit within life span development models that divide the life cycle into discrete age-related stages or phases. Age is an independent variable within the dependant development sequence, leaving environmental variability as causally unimportant (Schrive, 2011). With discovery of a generational effect linking the impact of historical events and experiences within the life cycle process to identity development, age-based norms are showing less congruence with current generations in determining the course of our lives (Schrive, 2011). Another difficulty with traditional life course and identity development models is that they often assume heterogeneity within group members. This neglects to address individual and familial patterns of coping and adaptation including strengths and abilities used to excel in the face of major socio-political barriers (Schrive, 2011).

For example, Erikson's Eight Stages of Man (1950) characterizes achievement of identity as confidence and ability to maintain inner continuity while developing a personality within a social reality that one understands. When conflict between role confusion and identity remains unresolved, incongruence can create self-doubt and raise questions about personal continuity. Erikson's model is useful to understand individual motivation and potential universality in the experiences/struggle to determine "who we are" as human beings. However, his model lacks necessary depth in relation to

Indigenous experiences of identity including societal or external pressures such as social stereotypes (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990), the role of internal processes such as internalized colonization (Hart, 2002), and the complexities of childhood relationships within this development. Erikson's model presupposes minority individuals' self-concept and self-esteem are significantly lower than counterparts within majority society. Such deficiency-based assumptions exclude the possibility of strength in cultural identity development in spite of majority system's inferiority messages (Anderson, 2002).

Racial identity development theories

Racial identity development theories juxtapose a relationship between dominant and marginalized peoples. Individuals work to reconcile incongruence between internalized inferiority messages received through dominant society and the experience of a positive racial identity. Sue and Sue (1999; 2003) propose five stages of development within this model: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. As an individual moves through these stages, there is identification with the dominant culture, including internalization of shame for their own culture. In the final stage, the individual experiences an awareness and appreciation of the positive aspects of their culture of origin, eventually challenging racism and oppression to develop an inner sense of security (Sue & Sue, 1999; 2003).

Mihesuah (1998) describes four life stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion/emersion, and internalization, (originally developed by Cross, 1991) to relate African American identity development to the development of American Indian identity. Assumptions include the fact that both groups live in a white world faced with racism, stereotypes, and oppression. The marginal status imposed by larger society makes the

development of a comfortable and positive identity a stressful endeavour. This is particularly so when the individual is of multi-heritage, or lack cultural knowledge, and/or does not physically resemble other members of the group (Mihesuah, 1998).

American Indian life stages as described by Misesuah (1998), above, indicates that an identity change process may be sought; this can be influenced by a negative or positive event that forces an individual to reevaluate their place in the world where four possible resolutions exist. First, the person can accept the identity society assigns, likely based on phenotypical features. Identification can vary and can be an uncomfortable experience. The second resolution is identification with two or more racial groups. This is only seen as a positive resolution if the person is able to maintain self across both groups and feels welcomed and accepted within both. Developing competence in strategies for coping with social resistance pertaining to membership within and between both groups is important. Resolution three is identification as a new racial group. The example given in this case is the ability to identify strictly as biracial or of multi-heritage on documents such as the census without elaboration. The fourth and final resolution is identification with a single race and/or cultural group. This differs from the first resolution in the sense that they seek identification based on their own desire rather than society's assignment, sibling's choices, or physical resemblance. This is seen as a positive decision if the person is accepted by the community of choice, does not feel marginalized or excluded from that group, and if they do not deny other aspects of their heritage. Internalization at stage four involves development of inner security about personal identity, which is viewed as becoming biculturally successful. It is operationalized when an individual is

able to rationally discuss racial issues with members of other racial/ethnic groups (Misesuah, 1998).

Biracial identity development theories

Bi-racial identity theories work to understand the process of development of identity in individuals of multiple heritages. Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) offer a lifespan approach to biracial identity development: preschool stage, entry to school, preadolescence, adolescence, college/ young adulthood, and adulthood. During the preschool stage the child's awareness of racial and ethnic difference increases dependent upon exposure to multiple ethnic groups. At school entry the biracial child begins to face questions about identity from peers and begins to place themselves into racial and ethnic categories in response. This process is influenced by level of school integration or diversity and availability of role models from different racial and ethnic groups. During preadolescence the biracial child becomes sensitive to differences in physical appearance, language and culture. Adolescence can be a difficult period for a biracial person as there is increasing external pressure to choose one racial, ethnic or cultural group over another. During college or young adulthood pressure remains for the biracial person to identify primarily with one culture; however, the likelihood increases that the individual will reject pressures and expectations of singular identity and move toward appreciation of their multiple ancestries. Adulthood furthers the process of integration and pieces of identity continue to be forged together. Similar to other stage-based identity theories, this linear process requires that earlier stages in development be resolved to allow for movement forward (Kerwin & Ponterotto, 1995).

Jacobs (1992) indicates that within a biracial individual's identity development process, perception of skin colour is considered but is variably dependent upon social, political, and environmental situations. Three stages are proposed in the development of biracial identity in children. Pre-colour constancy, stage one, involves children freely experimenting with colour. They have not yet defined others or themselves according to socially defined racial identities. Stage two is post-colour constancy where children have internalized the label of biracial, although with feelings of ambivalence linked to external expectations and societal racial prejudice. Consequently racial ambivalence is a task that must be resolved for racial minorities, including biracial individuals. Biracial identity, the final stage, involves diminished or absence of ambivalence through the awareness that racial group membership is not exclusively correlated to skin colour, rather that parentage is the determining factor (Jacobs, 1992).

Bi-cultural identity development theories

Theories of identity development from a bicultural perspective typically involve development of minority identity juxtaposed against majority society and attempt to explain the individual's responses to resolve the influence of majority society (Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005; Caillou, 1998). These theories provide an overview of the cultural change that occurs when contact and interaction between two cultural groups takes place. *Culture change* describes the process of interactions between two cultures including any resulting modifications, revisions, adaptations and new manners of expression (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 2006). Power dynamics must be considered within this interaction as dominant society's beliefs, values and behaviours are most often privileged. While change can occur within both majority and minority cultures 'most

desirable' and 'least desirable' indicators are perpetuated where most desirable attributes generally link to those of majority society (Robbins, et al, 2006).

Measurement of bicultural identity places behaviours, values, and cultural activities on a scale explaining the varying levels of assimilation, acculturation, bicultural socialization, adaptation and competence of a bicultural individual (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002; Robbins, et al, 2006). Bicultural individuals are said to be those who self-identify or self-categorize into a group. Bicultural people are those who have been exposed to and have internalized two cultures (Benet-Martínez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002) either into one behavioural repertoire or the ability to move between two cultural sets of norms and behaviours as a response to cultural cues (Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martínez, 2000).

Historically, theories embraced assimilation-integration into the dominant culture, rejecting one's ethnic culture of origin - as the pillar of achievement (Robbins, et al, 2006). Alternatively, acculturation theories propose that diverse cultural contact results in a give-and-take relationship, where adoption of aspects of both majority and minority cultures result in the development of a new culture containing elements of both. While this suggests a reciprocal process it remains inherently linear as one culture is giving up something in order to become acculturated (Robbins, et al, 2006).

Norton (1978) describes a dual perspective when identity development is influenced by a combination of *the nurturing system* including the individual, immediate, and extended family, and immediate community, and the *sustaining system* including larger society, political powers and institutions. Both minority and majority individuals experience the influence of nurturing and sustaining systems in identity development;

however, majority members are more likely to experience congruence or fluidity between the values and expectations of the two systems. Nurturing systems convey language, history and values and include reinforcement and internalization of cultural values. Minority members are more likely to experience conflict between the values within the nurturing and sustaining systems when incongruence between the two exists (Norton, 1978).

Bicultural competence, as a concept, emerged from Norton's dual perspective where bicultural socialization facilitates mastery over both minority and majority cultures. The emergence of a biculturally competent individual occurs through integration of positive qualities of the culture of origin with values and behaviours of dominant society resulting in psychological wellbeing (LaFramboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Individuals internalize the acculturation process in varying ways including differences in language use or preference, social affiliation, communication styles, cultural identity and pride, and cultural knowledge, beliefs and values (Zane & Mak, 2003). Biculturalism can also be associated with multiple and at times conflicting feelings including pride, uniqueness, a rich sense of community and history, identity confusion, dual expectations, and value clashes (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007). The impact of personalities, contextual pressures, acculturation, and demographic variables upon an individual's bicultural identity formation and expression is an area requiring further exploration (Nguyen & Benet-Martínez, 2007).

Hybridity: Beyond 'us-them' and 'either-or'

A third concept, hybridity, challenges the essentialist notions of authenticity. It posits that an individual can possess multiple cultural ancestries and through this

possession is able, from this position of cultural intelligence (Hoogvelt, 1997) become a 'go-between'. Paradies (2006) speaks of the concept of hybridity in relation to her Aboriginal-Anglo-Asian Australian location and argues that this frequently inhabited multi-racial Indigenous identity often demands that individuals choose exclusively Indigenous or non-Indigenous identity. Paradies (2006) further indicates that there exists a "hybrid space of multiplicity" (p. 357). This is weighted by external pressure to choose Indigenous or non-Indigenous, without allowing for multiplicity. Paradies (2006) describes the difficulty of being called in academic and professional contexts to "deploy my Indigeneity" (p. 358) while in the next breath being determined as inauthentic.

Ang (2001) asserts that we now exist in a "thoroughly hybridized world where boundaries have become porous, even though they are artificially maintained" (p. 87). This supports the movement towards an approach to remove Indigeneity from a frozen state of identity, to one that minimizes essentialization of the experience and allows for fluidity of identities to exist. Paradies (2006) summarizes, "I am suggesting that we free Indigeneity from the prison of romanticization and recognize that although the poor and the rich Indigene, the cultural reviver and the quintessential cosmopolitan, the fair, dark, good, bad and disinterested may have little in common, they are nonetheless all equally but variously Indigenous," (p. 363).

The concept of hybridity allows for discussion past the essentialization of a romanticized Indigenous experience of identity, and may be useful in other examinations, however, this concept, as with the previously discussed theories, do not speak to the foundation of understanding mixed-blood Indigenous experiences from a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology. This methodology developed for this project

honours maintaining a balance with Niwâkomâkanak (All my relations). It also acknowledges the connection and fluidity between all aspects of self (mental, physical, emotional and spiritual) and self in relation to personal decolonization (Hart, 2002). From this understanding, hybridity is an experience that will not be explored in depth for this project. Identity and its linkage to culture is a transformative and adaptive process within which emerges a range of possibilities related to individual contextualization of place, language, ancestral stories, and representations. It is within these possibilities that this search will be framed.

Utility of identity theories in understanding mixed-blood Indigenous experiences

In the preceding section of this literature review I have considered possible ways of addressing mixed-blood Indigenous identity experiences. With the exception of Miheusah (1998) and Sue and Sue (1999; 2003), most of the theories do not specifically address the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples. The ability of the above noted theorists to provide insight into the experiences of individuals who possess both non-Indigenous and Indigenous identities vary. As with the concept of identity itself, the ability of one theory or set of theories to address the diversity of experiences is limited. However, there are key areas that were incorporated into the current research project.

Racial identity development theories explicated through Sue and Sue (1999; 2003) and Miheusah (1998) include within their frameworks an increased understanding of the role of racism, stereotypes, internalization and marginalization. In addition, these theories explain the variations in development of a racial identity dependent upon factors including acceptance within the group of identification, physical appearance, and language. Each of these has implications for mixed-blood Indigenous individuals in Canada. These are the most useful factors in understanding experiences influenced by the

concepts of All my Relations and mino-pimatisiwin (the good life) in development of identity.

Models founded upon linear logic and acculturation principles, highlighting deficiency and categories of identity, are doomed to fail (Robbins, et al, 2006). Racial, ethnic, cultural and minority identity theories have attempted to address shortcomings of traditional identity development models in meeting the needs of non-majority experiences. Even in these attempts, however, a stage-based progression characterizes most theories (see Cross, 1991; Helms & Cook, 1999; Sue & Sue, 1999; 2003). Each of these theories addresses the development of identity where the contrast of majority and minority societies is centred, rather than the Indigenous experience itself and similar to Norton's (1978) dual perspective, internalization of inferiority occurs within a person's self-concept. Therefore, reconciliation is a process that must be moved through. While centering identity development on the resistance or success of acculturation or assimilation into dominant society does address socio-historical realities of a multicultural society plagued by dominant ideologies, it also entrenches identity within a juxtaposition of an "us and them" to sustaining a sense of self (Caillou, 1998). This can leave a mixed-blood Indigenous individual constantly navigating belonging in an in-between space.

Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) provide important insight into the interactive and relational aspects of identity development, in particular, in the role peers and school environments play in this process. The impact of these environments, and the ability of an individual to navigate these environments are both critical to understand mixed-blood Indigenous peoples experiences as they work to integrate pieces of their identities. Jacobs

(1992) provides a framework for understanding the role of lightness versus darkness of skin in the ability of a mixed-blood Indigenous individual to measure their Indigenousness against preconceived notions of society, community, family, and peer groups. The impact of these stereotypes vary according to an individual's ability to overcome the ambivalence of these judgments and understand the role of other factors such as membership in determining connection to identity.

From a racial and bi-racial lens, Sue and Sue (1999; 2003) provide insight into the experience of a mixed-blood Indigenous individual attempting to move through internal colonization based on an internalized mythical portrait (Memmi, 1965) towards a more integrative and healthy awareness of individual Indigenous identity. The mythical portrait as described by Memmi (1965) is a necessary experience to understand colonial relationships. The mythical portrait is the culmination and subsequent creation of systems that are based on fictional and destructive stereotypes applied as an overarching characteristic of the colonized group. They are all lazy. They are all drunks. They can't hold a job. They are violent and imbecile. They are in need of saving. This depersonalization of a group must occur in order for power and oppression to be justified and maintained. Actions and words are always framed to the benefit of the colonizer's experience. If a stereotype is enacted, it serves to perpetuate and affirm the stereotype. If a stereotype is broken, the individual is surely an impressive exception to the inferior group to whom they belong. Internalization of inferiority occurs through affirmation of the mythical portrait in every aspect of society. The mythical portrait is taught in the education system, supported through mainstream media, affirmed in social institutions created to "save" and come to the rescue, such as social work policies, organizations and

programs. This portrait is supported through racism at all levels in society. Once individuals begin to believe that this is true of themselves, that they are inferior, weak and without merit, it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Memmi, 1965).

The concepts of power, self-identification and impact of phenotypical attributes of an individual are addressed within Misesuah's (1998) adaptation of Cross's (1991) racial identity development theory, however, questions remain. What happens when an individual is not able to achieve internalization? Does this leave them frustrated and angry throughout the remainder of their life? An individual may be left feeling like acceptance within one group would mean embracing only aspects of self that pertain to that group and must necessarily reject all other parts of self that are incongruent. This would also involve rejecting parents, family, extended family, physical attributes – the sum of which is not easily forgotten (Misesuah, 1998).

In relation to the experience of mixed-blood Indigenous identity development, models of culture change and bicultural identity development are limited by first, assuming that the goal of each individual is assimilation or acculturation, and, second, that all who seek out assimilation or acculturation actually attain this outcome, and third the portrayal of this process as voluntary rather than coercive. Current theories lack insight into the impact of relationships, language, spirituality, and history in maintaining and sustaining family and community culture. In addition, to assume that assimilation and acculturation are socially functional in the interactions between a dominant and minority culture as an adaptive and unproblematic response is false (Robbins, et al, 2006). However of note for this project, useful aspects for an examination of the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in Canada can be found in the experience of a majority

and minority interaction including the conflict and clash felt between the two, as well as the varying possible resolutions to this conflict.

Linear processes contradict the possibility of circular movement, (Anderson, 2000; Hart, 2002; Simpson, 2011) thereby negating an Indigenous understanding of lifelong growth and healing as a journey rather than a destination.

It is misleading to assume that all Indigenous people experience Native cultural identity in the same way just because they were born into a Native community. This glosses over the multifaceted and evolving nature of identity as well as cultural differences among and within Native nations. (Weaver, 2001, p. 242)

It is my opinion that each of these identity development theories is limited in their ability to address the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous individuals.

The following section will examine Indigenous authors' assertions of factors influencing Indigenous identity development and applicability for mixed-blood Indigenous experiences.

Factors influencing the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous identity

The influence of Indigenous authors in coming to understand varying factors and diversity of experiences in relation to mixed-blood Indigenous identity is invaluable. Areas highlighted within published literature consider historical and current social, economic and political environments and the continuing impact of colonization upon individual, family and community mechanisms for supporting identity development. This literature also includes the divisive function of legislation on identity through the Indian Act and the function of connection and relationship to ancestors, community, language and land in the development of identity. The impact of individual phenotypical attributes such as lightness or darkness of skin, stereotypes, the mythical portrait and internalized

colonization are also of importance when coming to understand mixed-blood Indigenous individual's experiences.

Colonization, legislated identities, and impacts upon individuals

Within Canada the intergenerational impacts of colonization are multiple and complex and include disconnection and separation from language, family, community, land, and ultimately, identity (Anderson, 2000; Hart, 2002; Alfred, 1999, Alfred & Corntassel, 2005).

In the old days, having an identity crisis meant that you couldn't find the spirit or ancestor living inside of you. The strength of indigenous societies at the time, and the clarity of cultural boundaries between them, meant that people didn't have to think about their group affiliation – much less whether or not they were truly 'Indian'. But the breakdown of those traditional societies created in all Native people – even those consciously seeking recovery – many questions about belonging. (Alfred, 1999, p.85)

These separations have had, and continue to have, a profound effect on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Identification processes and the necessary relationships for building, maintaining and articulating strong healthy identities have been disrupted for several generations through colonial forces (Lansdowne, 2009; Lawrence, 2003), such as the *Indian Act*, Indian Residential school system, and the Child Welfare system, especially the sixties scoop. The history of government policies and legislation in this area of identity development is assimilationist at best and genocidal at the worst (Alfred & Corntassel, 2011; Lawrence, 2004).

The Indian Act has served the goal of “getting rid of the Indian problem” through identity stripping, and culture and language eradication through education policies (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Manzano-Munguía, 2011). Canada is the only country in the world that determines a group of people's membership and identity through legislation

(Lawrence, 2003). Public acceptance of institution's and state's exertion of identity characteristics create labels or 'credentials' upon which we are defined and measured. There is great potential that these credentials become internalized (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012).

It is one thing to recognize that Indian Act categories are artificial – or even that they have been internalized – as if these divisions can be overcome simply by denying their importance. Legal categories, however, shape peoples' lives. They set the terms that individuals must utilize, even in resisting these categories. (Lawrence, 2004, p. 230)

Further, a human reality stemming from our colonial history is the impact of legislated identity upon mixed-blood children of non-Indigenous and Indigenous parents (Manzano-Munguía, 2011; Palmater, 2011). This has produced multiply-situated individuals located within this colonial space who are neither 100% Indigenous nor 100% non-Indigenous and who are subject to legislative and political power assertions.

Yet, when identity is viewed as uni-dimensional and biological, it marginalizes those who do not fit the strict categories of belonging to one specific ethnic/racial group, and in the process excludes all those individuals who have 'mixed' descent, because their blood cannot be easily and exclusively connected with one group. (Sunseri, 2011, p. 156)

Throughout history, governments have attempted various legislative responses to identity when there has been backlash from Indigenous peoples. For example, the creation of Bill C-31 and Bill C-3, implemented as a result of legal challenges, to reset a gender balance in the determination of status Indian designation. While this serves to address near sighted identity inequity for the qualifying few, it remains a problematic legislated and external method of membership determination. Multiply-situated individuals struggle with attempting to negotiate identity development processes, gain recognition and experience belonging within a political environment of membership legislation, identity

politics and self-determination (Leslie, 2003; Palmater, 2011). This struggle, combined with internal colonization and systemic perpetuated racism, ensures that the implications of membership and belonging ripple through Indigenous individuals, families, communities and nations. Internalization of colonial mentality has left individuals with a low sense of self-esteem and self-confidence and feelings of shame and worthlessness.

Establishment of a clear and healthy collective identity is necessary in order for individuals to be able to see themselves within that collective. This relationship based foundation of identity is essential in personal Indigenous identity development (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012). Additionally, the collective with which the individual identifies must place a positive value on that particular identity in order for the individual to possess a positive sense of esteem and self. Colonialism critically severed relationships necessary for collective positive identities throughout Canada and created a tenuous environment from which to navigate these issues.

The implications of power upon Indigenous identity formation in Canada are far-reaching and potentially complicate formation and survival of an Indigenous identity within future generations. For example, Clatworthy (2005) predicts that due to First Nation identity legislation, status Indians will be non-existent in as little as two generations in some communities. The diversity of Indigenous identity within Canada is highlighted by factors such as self-definition, band membership, status, non-status, 6(1), 6(2), on reserve and off reserve (Clatworthy, 2005). Indigenous identity in Canada is enclosed within historical, social, economic, personal, familial, communal and legislative complexities (Lawrence, 2003; Palmater, 2011). Registration and legislated identity through granting of status and non-status has led to assertion of identity based on

economic and physical survival rather than culture (Alfred & Cornthassel, 2005). It is through the assertion of status identity that access to resources will occur, severing links between kinship and familial connections (Palmater, 2011). The divisive quality of legislated identity is described by Palmater (2011):

I therefore argue that the use of one-quarter blood quantum or degree of descent from a status Indian as a means of excluding Indigenous peoples from registration as Indians is either racial discrimination or an analogous ground of blood quantum/descent because it perpetuates racial stereotypes about Indigenous people based on a physical characteristic over which the affected individual has no control. Further the government has no business in determining what is an appropriate biological connection to equate with an Indigenous identity through status. (p. 118)

Current political, social, and economic divisions are rooted largely within the colonial interference upon traditional ways of life and identities (Lawrence, 2003; Palmater, 2011).

Given these realities, the complexity of identity demands a level of introspection, understanding and negotiation not typically required of individuals (Leslie, 2003). It is critical to also understand that such divisions continue to block nation-building potential, further dividing Indigenous groups in Canada. Perpetuation of division has come to be known as ‘cultural trauma’ of Indigenous peoples and yet Indigenous peoples have also become a party to exclusionary tactics through internalization of a colonial mentality where measurement of belonging is based upon varying power assertions (Palmater, 2011). It is important to explore how external regulatory mechanisms been internalized and influenced experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples. For example, do mixed-blood Indigenous peoples identify themselves in relation to the labels currently available or are there other ways that they are articulating their identity? In Canada some labels include Indigenous, Aboriginal, mixed-blood, First Nations, treaty, status, non-status, Inuit, and Métis. But these may not be the only ones. What are the complexities and

dynamics involved in these personal locations? Exploration of this issue must include the impact of the power of the state to control membership through granting of status and how this shapes an individual's sense of Indigenous identity. Lawrence (2011) explores these issues in relation to mixed-race urban Native experiences and the potential for nation-building and self-determination from these urban sites. In light of a growing body of urban mixed-blood individuals with tenuous links to a land-based community, it may be critical to understand the possibilities of nation building within this context.

Considering the impact of the profession of social work upon Indigenous individuals, families and communities in Canada suggests that within the profession steps must be undertaken to acknowledge and address the direction that social work must take. This moves beyond training social workers to work within existing systems;

Even though Aboriginal communities have evolved in their comprehension and capacity to deliver and implement social welfare programs, they have not been provided with autonomy to do programming in a way that fully takes into account the culture of their people. (Saulis, 2006, p. 116)

There are no social work policy frameworks that deal specifically with the colonization of identity and the implications for practice upon individuals, families and communities.

“The dysfunction of applying a mainstream paradigm of ‘social well-being’ and its resulting programming to Aboriginal populations has become more and more evident”

(Saulis, 2006, p. 119).

Long before colonizing populations passively or calculatedly invaded the territories and disrupted the lives of Indigenous Peoples in different parts of the world, there existed innovative formal and informal systems of support, welfare, and helping that were developed and maintained by various Indigenous peoples, nations, confederacies, tribes, villages, clans, societies and families. (Yellow Bird & Gray, 2008, p. 62)

Due to this lack of knowledge and action within the field of social work, colonial structures and ideologies continue to frame social policy. Social work as a profession does not serve to work towards social justice, decolonization or dismantling of oppressive systems and policies, but either remains blind or stagnant. The impact of colonization upon identity and lived experiences of Indigenous peoples is maintained by the status quo. Gaps in social work education link directly to the lack of lived experiences of Indigenous people (Harris, 2006).

Social justice in social work must be founded upon a secure and in depth understanding of decolonization, Indigenous worldviews, and self-determination (Harris, 2006). In training social workers to become competent professionals, guided by the Code of Ethics (2005), requires integration and acknowledgement of the profession's contribution to structures of colonization and the ways that the profession will move forward to assert decolonization.

Despite colonial assertions, legislated identities, social exclusions, and perpetually marginalized spaces, resistance remains within Indigenous individuals, families, communities and Nations. For example in the politics of status and non-status Indians, sites of personal resistance exist. The stories of participants may hold the key to understanding the importance of resistance in re-membering who we are. The idea of a 'lost' identity within the colonial existence is a falsity – in fact, it was not lost; but it was protected within the realms of the community, families and individuals who are working on re-membering. Resistance has protected identity. Understanding how and why resistance is alive is important to moving a healthy collective identity forward. What is it about Indigenous communities and identities that enhance a sense of belonging, self-

esteem, control, and meaningful existence (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012)? For some mixed blood Indigenous individuals, resistance and re-membering processes have been undertaken as methods of healing and decolonization thereby allowing individuals to reconnect with what is inherently within themselves.

Self-identification, authenticity & internalized colonization

Fascination and drive to produce a definition, even when coming from within the determination of Indigenous Nations, is a colonial residue where linear and rational thinking have mistakenly led us to believe that a neatly packaged definition of identity is even possible or desirable (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Leslie, 2003). According to Leslie (2003),

The quest for the perfect definition seems to have a relationship to the colonial legacy of a world simplified by a rational conclusion that the world has moved into the post-colonial. But if the world has moved on, how do we account for the self-destruction evident as indigenous people continue to impose the newcomers' (identity) politics on themselves? How do we account for the willingness to cooperate in various colonial schemes to enumerate molecules of blood and rationalize their right to exist: full blood, half-breed, or just plain mixed (-up)? (p. 10)

The majority of Indigenous identity literature is concerned with measurement of what it is and who has it. Blood quantum, status, band membership, treaty, connection to a traditional land base, ancestors, language, skin colour – each of these have been used as a measurement in order to determine authenticity. In the case of mixed-blood Indigenous individuals, each of these internally and externally imposed measurements also impacts desire or ability to self-identify. The problem remains that such a definition of authenticity is externally defined rather than based upon a true essence of self or desire for reconnection and wellbeing. Coupled with personal, family and community

internalization of colonization and the resulting lateral violence that can occur, identity can be a difficult development in a colonial reality.

Self-perception and identification are important components of Indigenous identity as they can lead to the desire and movement towards reconnection and healing (Anderson, 2000; Mihesuah, 1998). Leslie (2003) suggests that while self-identification or self-declaration can be problematic, so too can external sources of identification. This leads to questions about how legislation and economics can also influence identity construction and the ability of an individual to re-engage with Indigenous identity (Lawrence, 2003; Leslie, 2003). Politics of power and membership drive the assertion of a discrete, determinable and measureable Indigenous identity. From this location there is safety from which to discern who is and is not entitled, and awakens measurements of ‘authenticity’ (Leslie, 2003). In other words there are judgments made about individuals who may not live up to the stereotypical portrait and therefore they are judged as an inauthentic Indigenous individual who does not possess a right to claim connection. Fear of the scarcity of resources and limited ability to provide support for only those individuals recognized by the *Indian Act* as ‘status’ furthers the divisiveness entrenched within the politics of membership and identity. These politics serve to further the hierarchy created and maintained by the *Indian Act*. Smith (1999) cautions the danger in becoming too entangled in identity politics including questions of authenticity and essentialist divisions that threaten to continue to fracture possibilities for collaborative healing actions.

The question of skin colour is particularly important. Ideas of ‘passing’ within general society, without the necessity of self-identifying, can be an experience that serves

to further disconnect individuals from feelings of personal belonging. Being unrecognizable as Indigenous in settings where individual contexts are unknown have proven to be difficult at multiple levels for those who have lighter skin, or features not immediately recognizable as Indigenous (Lawrence, 2004).

Reframing the politics of identity by embracing a more inclusive method of determining membership would move the discussion past solely individual or collectively determined definitions of belonging. Within this understanding, Indigenous identity is formed through the relations between individual and collective. It is a balancing between individual autonomy and rights of the self-determining collective (Palmer, 2011; Retzlaff, 2005). Connection is more than an important piece of identity; it is an alternate form of connection not entirely planted within bloodlines as currently legislated and envisioned by many who serve to define Indigenous identity (Palmer, 2011). This divisiveness potentially causes more harm to individuals' abilities to express and connect with identities than supports them. Dis-membering Indigenous identified individuals through exclusionary tactics such as blood quantum has been a contrary mechanism to Niwâkomâkanak (All my relations) and relationality.

In contrast to the divisiveness of exclusivity, there have been numerous examples in Indigenous history of inclusivity and 'adoption' of members that supports an idea of membership based on relationship, kinship ties, commitment to peoples, culture and language (Sunseri, 2011). In these instances, we can consider that our ancestors, when referring to blood connections, "were not talking about the actual blood, but were referring to our deep connections with our past through our ancestors, with our present through our families and communities and to our future through our generations to come,"

(Palmater, 2011, p. 218). Perhaps this can serve to propel us to look deeper at the connections between ourselves, our families, and our communities that we have and how we can work to nurture these connections order to foster healthy identities.

Colonial trauma and the mythical portrait of “Indianness” continues to impact the way in which personal and collective Indigenous identities are informed. Images of primitive, inferior beings in need of education and civilization is a story that is perpetuated and manufactured with a clear manifesto of conquer, divide and extinguish (Doxtator, 2011; King, 2011; Memmi, 1965; Retzlaff, 2005). These images and stories continue to influence self perception particularly in relation to this constructed stereotyped identity of a savage, substance abusing, imbecile, inferior being and how it is internalized (Memmi, 1965; Retzlaff, 2005). Disengagement and dis-identification with Indigenous identity can occur in the case of mixed-blood individuals if a threat is perceived or if there is a lack of positive relation with Indigenous identity due to stereotypes and internalized colonization (Frideres & Gadacz, 2012). To heal from the internalization of these images is a process of building awareness, nurturing strong resources and decolonization.

Decolonization of self as a process of re-membering who we are

Part of a decolonization process includes rediscovering and reconnecting with a sense of identity, reconnecting with your self, re-membering who you are and where you come from. Smith (1999) and Laenui (2000) explicate powerful frameworks from which individuals, families, communities and systems can engage within processes of decolonization. The frameworks are complementary and provide a platform that values the voices and stories of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in their experiences of personal

identity. In addition both frameworks utilize Indigenous methodologies founded upon a commitment to healing. Laenui (2000) identifies five phases in the process of decolonization which include; 1) rediscovery and recovery, 2) mourning, 3) dreaming, 4) commitment, and 5) action. Smith (1999) identifies strategies for decolonization as follows: deconstruction and reconstruction, self-determination and social justice, ethics, language, internalization of indigenous experiences, history, and critique.

Through engagement and commitment to decolonization Indigenous peoples have the opportunity to rediscover and recover their histories, languages, cultures, and identities (Laenui, 2000; Smith, 1999). This recovery can be engaged through Smith's (1999) deconstruction and reconstruction, destroying what has been written that perpetuates the stereotype and continuing denigration of Indigenous peoples and re-telling and re-engaging the stories of the past in a way that places hope for the future. Self-determination and social justice within Indigenous methodologically grounded research is achieved when the research gives voice to the researched and values their realities, knowledge's, and life experiences (Smith, 1999).

Another method of decolonization includes therapeutic history (Niezen, 2009), a reclamation of the stories and history of one's ancestors whereby the reconnection with these stories includes the commonality of experiences with racism, oppression, and colonization in order to create a sense of belonging and identity. "Stories from the past comprise an essence of one's collective being that can be nurtured and drawn from in times of need" (Niezen, 2009, p. 150). Mourning is a necessary part of healing and moving towards the phase of dreaming. This stage allows for the mourning of losses and continued oppression seen within our everyday lives (Laenui, 2000). Healing the soul

wound is the work of naming and addressing historical intergenerational trauma that has been passed down from individual to family to community (Duran, 2006). The impact of this historical trauma is internalized oppression, and a narrative of violence, shame, guilt, anger, disconnection, exclusion, and hopelessness. Moving through experiences of historical trauma involves asking questions such as, “where did you learn how to do this?” to address the intergenerational connection, create a new narrative, and move forward in collective healing (Duran, 2006).

Dreaming is a process in decolonization where individuals explore their cultures, and centre their own histories, worldviews, and Indigenous knowledge systems in order to imagine possibilities and alternative realities. This process works to create a location from which to vision the future (Laenui, 2000). Collective visioning aids in strengthening the social fabric and supports the development of a healthy identity. The internalization of Indigenous experience creates a collective sense of identity where people can come together based on shared experiences to move towards self-determination (Chilisa, 2012). Finally, within a framework of decolonization, action is the phase where dreaming and commitment translate into social action and change (Laenui, 2000). The frameworks of Smith (1999) and Laenui (2000) work to create a space within which mixed-blood Indigenous peoples could articulate their experiences, potentially as a healing, transformative and decolonizing processes.

Finding space to articulate mixed-blood Indigenous peoples’ experiences

From an Indigenous perspective, identity is comprised of body awareness, self-concept, self-esteem, and self-determination (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984). Body awareness is the experience of physical presence. Self-concept is what is thought about

self and the potential one possesses. Self-esteem is how one feels about oneself including the potential for growth and change. Finally, self-determination is one's ability to use their desire and motivation to access and bring forward physical, mental, spiritual and emotional potentials (Bopp et al, 1984). Anderson (2000) explores identity, gender, and the reconstruction of self through reclamation of cultural traditions and dismantling of gender inequities in order to build healthy and flourishing communities. From this perspective, construction of a positive identity is developed through translating tradition into a contemporary context that also supports wellbeing of communities (Anderson, 2000). This is seen as a circular journey whereby the question of 'who am I' is answered by walking through resistance (who I am not), reclaiming (where have I come from), constructing (where am I going), and acting (what are my responsibilities) (Maracle, 1995, as cited in Anderson, 2000). Addressing feelings of 'homelessness' experienced by Indigenous women in healing recognizes disconnection is fostered through a lack of connection with home or land. Many Indigenous people in Canada feel deprived of home, deprived of belonging, and an identity that connects with a space to call home (Anderson, 2000). At times the reclamation of a particular geographical space can facilitate a sense of connection and relationship that allows an individual to define identity (Anderson, 2000).

In order to understand the importance of searching into experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples that centers *Niwâkomâkanak* (All my relations) and *mino-pimatisiwin* (a good life), it is necessary to explore the relational and interconnected ways of knowing, being and doing upon which these are founded. From an Indigenous understanding, personhood is characterized by connection to a web of relations (Battiste,

2000). Teachings of *The Sacred Tree* include an understanding of *wholeness* – all things are interrelated, everything is connected in some way with everything else. “It is therefore possible to understand something only if we can understand how it is connected to everything else,” (Bopp et al, 1984, p. 26). In order to rebuild relationships and facilitate these interconnections, to reinstate the wholeness of being, consciousness and action are required. Emotional, physical, mental and spiritual reconnection at individual, family, community and nation levels will aid in reclaiming what has been disconnected (Hart, 2002). This process of reclamation for mixed-blood Indigenous individuals can include a lens that examines their experiences through the concepts of wholeness, balance, connection, harmony, growth and healing.

Critical to the concept of relationality in identity development are the foundational aspects of an Indigenous approach as outlined by Hart (2002). The concept of wholeness necessitates that in order to understand a piece of something we must seek to understand how it is connected to all of the other parts. Balance is experienced through attention and harmony with all aspects of self, family, community, nation, and all other living things in the natural world. While balance is not a final state of achievement it requires that we pay consistent attention to all parts of our self and self in relation to all other aspects. Balance also requires that we seek to attain wellness in a way that does not impact the wellness of others in a negative manner. States of disconnection are at the root of imbalance in wellbeing. When relationships and the connections individuals possess with everything around them are honoured and nourished, this leads to harmony.

Harmony is a reflection of the value that whenever you take, you must also give in return.

Growth is the continual experiencing of wholeness, balance, connectedness and harmony within self and in relation to all of creation and is expressed through a centred being.

Healing is seen as an active and necessary process for all individuals. Our interconnections require that we reflect on how our journey impacts everything and everyone around us (Hart, 2002). These foundational aspects can provide important insight into a mixed-blood Indigenous individual's experience of identity. As discussed previously, there can be many internal and external influences that lead individuals to reject or separate from pieces of identity. Alternately, individuals may be excluded from claiming an identity due to varying factors. Each of these examples cultivates a disconnected and discrete sense of identity that is not supported through an understanding of the role of Niwâkomâkanak (All my relations) and mino-pimatisiwin (a good life) in overall wellbeing. In order to understand self in totality, it is important to be aware of the aspects that make one whole, and that each of these interconnected pieces combined and in balance can work towards harmony, growth and healing. This can involve a process of coming to know how each of the factors that impact our experiences as mixed-blood Indigenous individuals in turn impact this balance and maintenance of wellbeing.

Summary

Healing at an individual level of transformation is encased within multiple social dimensions where the direct impact of such a process has the potential to touch not only the individual but also the family and community, transforming a person's interaction with those around them (Kirmayer, Brass, & Valaskakis, 2009). These stories are about healing, reconnecting to self and to collectivity, "a psychological healing of a most intense nature: that of knowing who you are and where you belong," (Weber-Pillwax,

2001, p. 162). The *experiential* aspect of Indigenous knowledge also means that we are constantly learning, doing, experiencing, and reflecting as a part of learning and living. This is about our continuous journeys as human beings. This is about how we find connections, meaning and belonging in light of circumstances that attempt to cultivate disconnection, individuality and exclusion. These journeys differ in the method, sound, feel, expression, and processes; however, they also have the ability to recreate, to rebuild, to reawaken and to strengthen. These unique journeys have the potential to build strength and camaraderie or kinship through similarities and teachings made available within stories, emotions and experiences.

This research project does not search for a universal truth, nor do I seek to generalize experiences. What I am proposing is that by creating space for individuals to share influences of relational experiences upon their understanding of the question ‘who am I?’ allows a greater insight into the complexities of such a journey. This would also move us beyond surface discussions of who has ‘it’ and how do we get ‘it’, i.e. Indigenous identity. This is a project about relationships. A relational worldview focuses on coming together to support one another through fostering and nurturing supportive, meaningful relationships (Hart, 2002; 2010). This relationality is at the essence of identity as well. Within the field of social work, it is critical that, as helpers, we are constantly working towards our own balance and wellbeing. This is the responsibility we hold to the people that we engage with (Hart, 2002). Duran (2006) asks us to reflect on how can we help someone who is alienated when we are alienated ourselves? In other words, if we do not know our roots, if we have not committed to the identity work necessary to answer the question, “who am I?”, then we are not able to engage in healing

or helping work with others. It is by exploring the roots of identity, “finding their tribe, the name of their tribal God, and their tribal creation story” (Duran, 2006, p. 45), that we are better positioned to work with individuals in a good way. In my role as a helper it is my responsibility to explore the meaning of my identity, of my experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous identity and its possibility for healing, transformation, and decolonization. From this space, this project serves as a relational way of connecting with others who are also undertaking this journey of discovery and re-membering.

The following chapter will outline the development of a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology in order to explore and engage with the experiences and stories of participants. Expression of the processes undertaken within this methodology will be central.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Introduction

An Indigenous-grounded research agenda involves four major processes including transformation, mobilization, healing and decolonization (Smith, 1999). Rather than being an end vision, these processes engage in psychological, spiritual, social, and collective movements that continually impact individual, family, and community transformation, mobilization, healing, and decolonization (Smith, 1999). Indigenous research methodologies are alive, relational, and reciprocal (Hart, 2010; Wilson, 2008). In the search for knowledge, attentiveness to spirit through sacred ceremony and protocols, and use of intuition, inward reflection and inner knowings are important to the overall journey (Absolon, 2011). Grounded within a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology that encompasses a journey of *mino-pimatisiwin* (a good life) (Hart, 2002), the aim of this project is to engage with these overall goals.

How we come to know and who we are as researchers is as important as the knowledge we seek (Absolon, 2011). Reconnecting that which has been disconnected through asserting Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, honouring the interconnections and relationships is necessary to explore these experiences in a *good way*. Cardinal (2001) articulates Indigenous research as,

Essentially I am saying that Indigenous research methods and methodologies are as old as our ceremonies and our nations. They are with us and have always been with us. Our Indigenous cultures are rich with ways of gathering, discovering, and uncovering knowledge. They are as near as our dreams and as close as our relationships. (p. 182)

I will utilize personal stories facilitated through natural conversations (Kovach, 2010) as strategies of inquiry by which to honour personal subjective knowledges and experiences

related to participants' identities. Inquiry will be supported through researcher self-location, attention to inward knowing and recording of researcher reflexivity as additional strategies of inquiry. The following section provides a description of the methodology and research design.

Foundations of Indigenous methodologies

The foundation of Indigenous methodologies rests upon Indigenous worldviews (Absolon, 2008; Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). A worldview is a personal belief system connecting individuals to their identity and knowledge. This provides a basis for how we come to know who we are, where we are from, what we know and how we interact within the world. According to Hart (2010),

Worldviews are cognitive, perceptual, and affective maps that people continuously use to make sense of the social landscape and to find their ways to whatever goals they seek. They are developed through a person's lifetime through socialization and social interaction. (p. 2)

Worldviews are passed from generation to generation and are rooted within traditions, languages, relations and culture (Absolon, 2008). Worldview impacts methodology in that it is interwoven within every decision, implicit or explicit, made by the researcher, and, therefore, profoundly impacts the research process, motives, purpose, and roles. It provides grounding of the self in the research process and requires articulation (Absolon, 2008).

Simpson (2000) has outlined seven principles of Indigenous worldviews: 1. knowledge is holistic, cyclical, and dependent upon relationships and connections to living and non-living beings and entities; 2. there are many truths and these truths are dependent upon individual experiences; 3. everything is alive; 4. all things are equal; 5. the land is sacred; 6. relationship between people and spiritual world is important; and, 7.

human beings are least important in the world. Foundations of an Indigenous worldview include the understanding that all life is sacred and all life forms are connected (Youngblood Henderson, 2009). As humans we are only one strand within the web of life; and, we are dependent upon all of the other strands in order to survive. Therefore we must respect, value, and care for all of our relations (Youngblood Henderson, 2009).

It was important for me to come to understand the previous principles and how they support the development of a Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree) methodology as this has not been explicated previously in a manner that was accessible to me for this project. From these understandings I was able to frame my research into Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree) ways of knowing, being and doing as they can be applied to my project.

Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree) methodology

Tribal research methodologies are built upon the specific ways of being, knowing and doing of a tribal group and are connected to overall worldview. Indigenous epistemologies are action-oriented, inter-relational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, and spiritual (Kovach, 2010). This research project is based upon the world view of Muskego Inninuwak (Swampy Cree), specifically of Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwak (Fox Lake Cree) described by Ross (2011) as deeply rooted and interconnected with the land:

Fox Lake people's territory is situated in the northeast region of Manitoba, embraced by rivers, lakes, and muskeg. Fox Lake people's history is rooted in stories, landmarks, relationships among land, people and animals, and through the Inninu language. More specifically, their relationship to the land and waters is reflected in the telling of stories and legends about Aski; the naming and remembering of places and landmarks; the use and navigation of the local landscape and waterways; and the received knowledge they hold about the plants, animals, and seasonal cycles within the territory. The Kischi Sipi, or "Great River" (Nelson River), is the largest water system to flow through the Fox Lake people's territory. (p. 13)

The articulation of this methodology is based upon my personal transformative, mobilizing, healing, and decolonizing journey. I have begun to reclaim knowledge that was to a large degree, excluded from my childhood due to personal, familial, and societal impacts of colonization and the destruction it left in its wake. Foundational channels of knowledge transmission from older family members to myself, which would have enabled me to come to understand my place and role within my Fox Lake Cree family and community, were in almost all cases severed.

There is little articulated documentation of a Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwuk (Fox Lake Cree) worldview. What has been documented and written down has been in response to my community's involvement in reclaiming and asserting power over their right to continue to live in relation to our traditional territories. As a result of generations of hydroelectric development in the traditional territory of Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwak (Fox Lake Cree), the transmission of a healthy sustainable sense of self from one generation to the next was shattered. Beginning in the 1950's and 1960's developments included the Kettle, Long Spruce and Limestone Generating Stations, and the Radisson and Henday Converter Stations within Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake) traditional territory. The imposition of developments and the resulting influx of people into the region to dam and flood the land in order to harness the power of the water for economic benefit of others resulted in numerous impacts upon individuals, families, the community and land to which we belong. These impacts will serve as a reminder that what one does to the land upon which we live and the way in which this is carried out *does* impact people. In fact it impacts the children of the first generation of people exposed to the developments, and the children of those children, to which I can personally attest.

These historical developments disconnected Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwuk (Fox Lake Cree) from vital resources and supports to strive towards mino-pimatisiwin (a good life). Fast forward to this decade and there is renewed interest in further hydroelectric development in my community's traditional territory. As a result, resistance, transformation, and healing continue to be relevant within Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake). This has not come easy. It is a process through which we learn, as individuals, as family, as community from trial and error and begin to uncover deeply entwined intergenerational and internalized impacts of the destructions. As a part of this movement, Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwuk (Fox Lake Cree) have been involved in ensuring that what occurred with previous developments does not repeat itself in an even more devastating manner. One method of protecting the community against future impact, in the form of loss of and disconnection from traditional and communal knowledges, has been the recording of life histories of older people in Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake). I was fortunate enough to be involved in the work in my community as a researcher where I engaged with people's stories, bore witness to impacts upon relationship and spirit. Being immersed in the stories of my peoples has allowed me great appreciation for the necessity of knowing who we are and where we come from for the wellbeing of not only my generation, but also the generations who will follow.

Another method of resistance and transformation has been direct research with knowledge keepers and resource users in Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake) to record the vital role of the traditional land in sustaining a people. The written Makeso Sakahukan worldview that I was able to access as a result of this important work was a key piece of my healing. To read an articulated Makeso Sakahukan (Fox Lake) standpoint in relation

to proposed developments, including the direct impact on the environment of our traditional territory, gives me hope. This document was written by good people doing good work to capture important aspects of Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwak (Fox Lake Cree) and to support knowledge keepers in making a statement about impacts. Still, I am torn over understanding the worldview of my community as one fuelled by a corporation's desire to further exploit our traditional territories. But it is there, written, this document outlining the further impacts of a corporation upon the fabric that holds together Makeso Sakahukan Inninuwak (Fox Lake Cree). It bears witness.

As a part of my reclamation I continually seek a deeper understanding of and connection to a Muskego Inninuwak worldview. I am not speaking from a place of fluency in this ancestral language, or from a deeply rooted connection to the land that my grandmothers before me possessed, nor from a place where I can say that I know all there is to know about what this means to my journey. I am, however, coming from a place of learning and growth, where, with deep respect, I open myself to the possibilities of a commitment to reclamation and decolonization. This is the location from which I speak to a Muskego Inninuwak methodology. This location from which I am constantly working to search out, come to understand, and reclaim ways of being, knowing, and doing in a good way.

A Muskego Inninuwak worldview informs the way in which we come to know about the world around us. Hart (2010) indicates the following methods through which Cree knowledge is shared and the ways of knowing privileged from this perspective:

Indigenous epistemology is a fluid way of knowing derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling, where each story is alive with the nuances of the storyteller. It emerges from traditional languages emphasizing verbs, is garnered through dreams and visions, and is intuitive and

introspective. Indigenous epistemology arises from the interconnections between the human world, the spirit and inanimate entities. (p. 8)

Within this foundation, the use of story and natural conversations as methods honours characteristics of Indigenous knowledge, including that it is personal, holistic, oral and experiential (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Ways of coming to know

We come to know about the world by engaging with Indigenous knowledge.

While Indigenous knowledge is highly contextual and dependent upon the specific and therefore variable environments and languages, there are overarching characteristics that encapsulate Indigenous knowledge (Brant-Castellano, 2000). First, a characteristic is that it is *personal*, rooted in personal and subjective experience where the degree to which you can trust what a person is telling you is based upon the relationship between the speaker and the listener, taking into account integrity and perceptiveness of the speaker. This means oftentimes knowledge can be varying with even contradictory accounts, but remains a valid account unique to the person (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Within this understanding, the search for truth is not an establishment of one ‘correct’ view over another but rather honours personal experience as individual truth. It is important to distinguish wisdom from personal knowledge; wisdom is based upon social validation where collective analysis and consensus building occurs (Brant-Castellano, 2000). “Thus, an Indigenous research paradigm is structured within an epistemology that includes a subjectively based process for knowledge development” (Hart, 2010, p. 8).

Second Indigenous knowledges are communicated through *oral transmission*.

There is a responsibility inherent within oral transmission of knowledge for both transmitter and learner. The transmitter is responsible for passing knowledge which the

learner is ready to receive, considering whether the learner is ready to use this knowledge in a responsible manner (Brant-Castellano, 2000). This responsibility for knowledge also indicates that a relationship between the two are necessary for responsible transmission—knowledge is passed on within context of this relationship that reflects both an intellectual and emotional interaction based upon shared experience or relationship (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Third, Indigenous knowledge is *experiential*. The way in which we can come to know about the world is through our active engagement in experiences. To “know” is about experiential, direct knowing (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Perceptual experiences are another aspect of Indigenous epistemology, where perception includes experiential insight (Hart, 2010), an exercise of inwardness (Ermine, 1995), that allows one to “subjectively experience a sense of wholeness” (Hart, 2010, p. 8).

Fourth, Indigenous knowledge is *holistic*. This requires we engage through all of our senses working in conjunction with intuitive or spiritual insights. This holistic nature of Indigenous knowledge and experience is often visually conveyed through the use of a medicine wheel representing the circle of life, past, present and future (Brant-Castellano, 2000). The medicine wheel is a tool that teaches us to seek balance within our own lives, to form and honour our relationships. This teaches that collaborative relations are essential in order to work towards individual balance, in other words, to strive for *mino-pimatisiwin* (Hart, 2002). The holistic quality of Indigenous knowledge requires that we come to understand the totality of experiences. Attempting to dissect or de-contextualize experiences from this totality contradicts this characteristic (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Connecting ways of knowing with Indigenous research

Absolon (2011), through her dissertation, searched *how we come to know*, and the use of Indigenous research methodologies by Indigenous scholars across Canada in their own theses and dissertations. In the analysis of her experience, she articulates shared knowledge through a symbol that came intuitively in dream work. The interconnected and interdependent mechanisms of a petal flower represents Indigenous methodologically founded searches for knowledge in a wholistic manner. *How we come to know and who we are* as researchers is as important as the knowledge we seek out (Absolon, 2011).

Absolon's *wholistic framework for Indigenous Methodologies in search for knowledge* contains six key interconnected elements (2007). The roots of the flower provide the foundational elements of the search; paradigms, manifested through the actions, behaviours, ethics, and methods utilized within the research (Absolon, 2011). The flower centre situates self within the research project through self-location, memory, and connection to ancestors rooting ourselves within our histories. This allows the researcher to make explicit their connection with the ultimate motivation and purpose behind the project. In most cases, this is a deeply personal motivation intimately connected to our selves. The leaves are the methodological journey of knowledge seeking; it is an organic and emergent learning journey of both internal and external processes. This develops over time and can involve healing, transformation, and traveling to home communities, territories, to families, and over land. The stem provides the connections between the roots, the centre, and the leaves of the flower and is an important reminder that each of these aspects is not isolated but rather is affected through the strengths and supports of the researcher. Finally the petals of the flower are the

diverse methodologies chosen by the researcher, represented through spirit, mind, body and heart. “In the search for knowledge spirit is attentiveness to spirit through sacred ceremony and protocols, and use of intuition, inward reflection and inner knowings” (Absolon, 2011, p. 119). This represents the wholeness necessary in how we come to know. Depicted within the model of the petal flower, Indigenous research methodologies are alive, relational and reciprocal (Absolon, 2011).

The oral, experiential, holistic and personal characteristics of Indigenous knowledge (Brant-Castellano, 2000) necessitates that ways of knowing and coming to know about an idea necessarily lead to specific ways of being and doing based upon a Muskego Inninuuk (Swampy Cree) understanding of the world. Each of these is connected and crucial, as depicted within the petal flower wholistic framework described above (Absolon, 2011). These ways of being include the magnitude with which relationality and relational accountability are included in the design and implementation of this project.

Ways of being: Relational knowledges and relational accountability

“Indigenous epistemologies live within a relational web, and all aspects of them must be understood from that vantage point” (Kovach, 2010. p. 57). Fundamental within a Muskego Inninuuk (Swampy Cree) worldview is the belief that knowledge and experiences are relational (Ross, 2011). From this understanding, in this project, addressing experiences of individuals must also acknowledge and incorporate respect of and accountability to relationship. This includes interpersonal relationships, relationships built with research participants, relationship with Creation, relationship with ideas, concepts and everything around us (Wilson, 2001). We come to understand more about

an idea through exploring what it is connected to, and what it is in relation with. It is through our understanding and experience of relationship that we can work to express knowledge shared between participant and researcher (Wilson, 2001; 2008). This relational understanding is also important for the researcher in order to express their relationship with the ideas and concepts that are being explored. The research project described utilizes a Muskego Inninuuk (Swampy Cree) methodology based on understandings and values of *mino pimatisiwin*, meaning to live a good life in a way that honours our relationships and connections to all things, in a way that seeks *é-tipâpéskopanik* (balance) and is in *minonénimowin* (harmony) (Ross, 2011).

As Inninuuk (Cree), we are interconnected with all elements of the world around us. Families, communities and nations are equally critical to the understanding of who we are as individuals and in relation to those around us. It is through these relationships that we come to understand our identity, our responsibilities, and the roles that we must fulfill within these relationships. *Niwâkomâkanak* (all my relations) speaks to the interconnection, relatedness, and equality of all things. We are all relations. These relationships are our connection to identity, community, spirituality, and our history and are founded upon *Aspénminowin* (trust) and *Kisténitamowin* (respect) (Ross, 2011).

From this, it is essential that a Muskego Inninuuk methodology must acknowledge and incorporate relational accountability. Relational accountability is a foundational principle that expresses the need to respect and maintain balance within each of these relationships. In other words, this is the way in which we are responsible for fulfilling our relationships and answering to all my relations with the world around us (Weber-Pillwax, 2001). As Wilson (2001) emphasizes:

As a researcher you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research. You are not answering questions of validity or reliability or making judgments of better or worse. Instead you should be fulfilling your relationships with the world around you. (p. 177)

Relationality impacts every decision and interaction within a research framework (Kovach, 2010). For example, within a sampling framework this means that it is not simply a matter of the researcher choosing the participants. It is more of a reciprocal process with some form of pre-existing relationship, connection, and measure of trustworthiness signifying a respectful approach to research (Kovach, 2010).

In considering research validity, I hear the Elders' voices: Are you doing this in a good way? There is a Cree word, *tâpwê*, which means to speak the truth. This is about validity, or relationally speaking, credibility. To do this means to tend to the process in a good way, so that no matter the outcome you can sleep at night because you did right by the process. (Kovach, 2010, p. 52)

Trust between researcher and participant necessitates that if a relationship does not already exist between the two, this must be built before any data is collected (Kovach, 2010; Thomas, 2005). "Trust takes time to build and sustain – therefore from an Indigenous perspective this necessary element is facilitated by relationship between researcher and participants" (Thomas, 2005, p. 248). This can be furthered through the use of personal location as a strategy for strengthening participant's understandings of researcher's connection to and motivation with the area to be explored.

Ways of Doing: Research Design

The following section will describe the research design based on the previous introduction of a Muskego Inninuwook (Swampy Cree) methodology. This will include introduction of the research questions, participants, strategies of inquiry, data collection, and processes for meaning making within this project.

Research questions

In order to move towards the objectives of this project the following questions have been explored:

1. How do individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry experience their identities?
 - a. How have experiences of identities changed or developed?
 - b. What mechanisms have impacted this change or development?
2. How do the concepts of Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin influence the development of identity?

By answering these interrelated questions, this research hopes to add insight into the experiences of individuals who are coming to understand and relate to their locations as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples including the ways in which their relations have informed, supported, or built barriers to personal wellbeing and decolonization processes.

The overall goal of this research is to create a space for voices not currently included in literature - to express the impacts of systems, relationships and the ways in which people come to understand mino-pimatisiwin and Niwâkomâkanak in personal identity development and wellbeing. Another goal is to contribute to the dialogue on Indigenous identity in Canada that counters exclusionary notions of essentialization and authenticity based on imposed labels. This project seeks to uncover the essences of our own being. In other words, to ask, when we are standing right in front of ourselves, why have we become so disconnected from who we are at our essences, that we must now begin to search, to discover, to reconnect, and to heal towards wholeness of our own authentic self? (Eni, May 27, 2011, personal communication). This was an important

question for me. I immediately sat and wrote some reflections on what she shared with me. From this day, her question has framed not only my project, but also my own personal journey towards resurgence.

I think that this is an important question to consider and so I will sit with it. I can share that my first reaction to this question is that this is a human condition, experience where we have become so disconnected from our selves, what it means to be our self that we feel like there is a space within our self that is empty – a hole, a space that when we do not know how to name it – is inconsequential. But when we begin to reflect and listen to the language of our hearts and bodies we ask what is this lack, or emptiness that we feel? What propels us to search for more than what we encompass at a particular moment? It is through this search for our selves that we can connect as human beings – within humanity. Where my search may lead me in a particular direction due to my specific location, it is the process of journeying itself that can lead us to connection and intimacy with everything and everyone around us. (Rowe, May 27, 2011)

Research participants

In order to ensure that knowledge specifically related to Cree mixed-blood experiences were captured, I purposely sampled participants who possessed specific knowledge in connection to these experiences. Participants were individuals who have some level of established relationship with myself as the researcher in order to account for relationality and trust within the process (Hart, 2002; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Four mixed-blood Cree individuals and four Cree Elders were sought out as key informants and will be described in further detail below. This sample size is comparable to previous exploratory projects incorporating Indigenous methodologies that have sought specific knowledge in order to come to understand more about a specific area of examination. These experiences and stories, while sharing similarities, are also based upon layers of context and variability with relations and situations. This project does not seek to generalize participants' stories, but rather create space and avenues for sharing points of connection, relationship, and understanding of experiences.

For this project, purposive sampling was undertaken. According to Silverman (2005), purposive sampling,

allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested... Purposive sampling demands that we think critically about the parameters of the population we are studying and choose our sample case carefully on this basis (p. 129).

In other words, as the researcher, I specifically sought out individuals within which the experience of mixed-blood Cree ancestry and exploration of what this means to identity development was more likely to be present (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). One group of four participants was purposively sampled to possess the following characteristics: adult individuals between the ages of 20 and 45 who identify as possessing Cree (Indigenous) and non-Indigenous ancestry. Selected participants have grown up disconnected at some level from community of origin or from ancestral languages, have been impacted by external labeling mechanisms, and have experienced ambiguity in relation to self-identification. Individuals were sought who have begun to explore the meaning of their identities in relation to their experiences and journeys towards wellbeing. These individuals have engaged at some level with the idea of identity and have at least begun to articulate questions about the meaning of their Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity expression and experiences including ways in which they identify with and honour the totality of these multiple identities.

A second group of participants was purposively sampled for their specific knowledge in the area of Cree identity development. Four Manitoba Cree Elders were sought as keepers of traditional knowledge in the area of identity development. An Elder is someone who:

- 1) is knowledgeable about tradition including ceremonies, teachings, and the process of life; is ideally a speaker of a Native language;
- 2) lives those traditions;
- 3) is old enough to have reached a stage of experience at which it is appropriate for them to communicate what they have learned from life and tradition;
- 4) is recognized by the community for their wisdom and ability to help;
- 5) is still an individual with varying knowledge and skills;
- 6) is able to interpret tradition to the needs of individuals and the community;
- 7) is often asked to represent First Nation views as symbols of the culture or through active involvement with issues and individuals. (Stiegelbauer, 1996, p. 62)

Elders possess wisdom and insight gained from lived experiences and connection to ancestral teachings and ceremonies that offer profound possibilities for reconnecting and re-membering mixed-blood Indigenous peoples with their roots.

Researcher Preparation

Personal location. Self-location within Indigenous research manifests in variable ways where the overall goal is to state the perspective and location from which we, as researchers, view and understand the world (Kovach, 2010). It is a critical starting point that provides participants with insight into who we are, where we come from and our intentions as researchers (Sinclair, 2003). Locating self within Indigenous research includes attention to cultural protocol, i.e., involving, informing, including, and respecting Indigenous peoples involved in the research process (Absolon & Willett, 2005). It is integral to ethical Indigenous methods of inquiry as it creates a mechanism for transparency (Kovach, 2010). This allows participants to understand our personal

purposes, motivations, and experiences with the research idea (Kovach, 2010). Putting ourselves forward allows for accountability and positionality to remain clear within and throughout the research (Absolon & Willett, 2005).

By articulating our location we are situating ourselves in relation to our environment, land, language, spirituality, family, community, and social elements of our lives (Absolon & Willett, 2005). It honours the uniqueness of our experiences, and also creates an avenue for connection between individuals. Location speaks to the relational foundation of a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology. Absolon and Willett (2005) identify:

Location brings to the forefront both our commonalities and our distinctiveness, distinguishing us from one another and avoiding the ‘pan-Indian myth’ that Aboriginal peoples are all the same, one race, and one people. We are *not* all the same... we must consider who we are relationally, interracially, intergenerationally, geographically, physically, spiritually, politically, socially, and economically... we need a hologram to illustrate the multiplexity, multidimensionality, and interconnection of all aspects of our Aboriginal realities. (p. 110)

Location is speaking about who we are and where we come from, in other words, this is our lens from which we view and interact within the world (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2010). Location is a method by which the researcher also can share their story, an essential tool of recovery to honour individual diversity and recover from internalized colonization, racism and oppression (Absolon & Willett, 2005). Indigenous peoples in Canada are dynamic and diverse and vary in processes of revisioning and retrieving the pieces of who we are in recovery from colonial processes. Absolon and Willett (2005) indicate that this is a powerful catalyst that can become a:

remembering process and re-membering of individual experiences into a collective knowing and consciousness. The idea of re-membering as a research method and process facilitates a full reconnection, which is also healing to our

recovery process. Remembering facilitates recovering stories, experiences, teachings, tradition, and connections. (p. 116)

What I share with participants adds to what they already know about me, my family, and the progress of my search for healing from a fragmented and disconnected sense of self. I capture the impact of internalization of labeling, lateral violence, and external assumptions through a journal entry:

Danielle Naumann (2008) speaks about the idea of reclaiming an identity – through attainment of status for which we have no right to assert. From which an individual has been disconnected through a couple of generations – and the implications of an individual claiming this identity for less than honourable intentions, in order to gain status, privilege or access to special treatment in certain situations like being able to state that they are part of an ethnic minority for a government job for example.

This is of great concern in the politics of identity, where assertion of self-identification, or even gaining of a status card when there has been no connection to a land for several generations – in light of urbanization. It brings to the front questions of authenticity and the power that is being taken in the cases of these individuals who choose to assert identity in situations of personal benefit.

This is sitting uncomfortably with me for several reasons – first – I too am urban, have been disconnected from my land base and grew up largely off-reserve. That physical connection was tenuous – but I made the decision to obtain that status card at the age of 18 and more so to reconnect and re-member through a process of decolonization. What is this saying about me? What is this saying about my intentions? Am I removing power from the idea of Indigenous identity? When I teach my children that they have Cree heritage, am I seen as taking advantage of self-identification processes and asserting myself in a space where I in fact have no belonging?

These are questions that have sat with me for years, and they continue to sit, and be triggered when questions of authenticity emerge, when measurements are being made about levels of Indianness, judgments made about whether or not I am authentic enough to pass a litmus test based upon the possession of externally defined expectations. I feel those judgments often burning through my skin.

It sets me back on my journey to reclaim this connection and belonging that was taken from me – makes me stumble a little – shaky in my grounding – glancing down to check my footing. Swaying at the trembling. I hope that I can recover. And I wonder to myself whether there is a time when I will question less, be

rocked less often, find my strength and voice more easily. I wonder.... (Rowe, October 2011)

Journal Reflections. As part of personal preparations, data collection, and meaning making, I recorded experiences, observations, inward knowings, feelings, and processes from my self as both a researcher and participant engaged within the process of coming to understand experiences and stories of the participants. Inward knowledge is important to Indigenous inquiry strategies (Kovach, 2010). Ermine (1995) articulates the criticality of inward ways of knowing to coming to understand the world around us. It is crucial that knowledge is sought through the inner space, a method that makes individuals receptive to knowing. It is within our selves and becoming connected to the inner self that our greatest resources can be accessed (Ermine, 1995). Hart (2010) shares:

This exploration is an experience in context, where the context is the self in connection with happenings, and the findings from such experience is knowledge. Happenings may be facilitated through rituals or ceremonies that incorporate dreaming, visioning, meditation and prayer. (p. 8)

Reflective journaling of my experiences within the research process overall, as well as in relation to my participation in natural conversations and personal stories, has been gathered over the project. These reflections will be included in the meaning making section to support my own relational accountability and to remain true to the methodological foundation of this work.

Strategies of Inquiry

Strategies of inquiry are based upon chosen methodology and work to further our understanding of a particular area. Strategies are informed by the question ‘how do I find out more about this reality’ and can be seen as a roadmap used to get you to where you are wanting to go (Wilson, 2008). Strategies are ways of gathering, discovering, and

uncovering knowledge and are “as our dreams and as close as our relationships” (Cardinal, 2001, p. 182). Strategies of inquiry allow for flexibility of methods, chosen as appropriate for the particular context and subject at hand. This allows the researcher to remain accountable to the relationships necessary for the overall journey and to honour the knowledge being shared through the participants’ stories. As a researcher, choices regarding gathering and interpreting story is a reflexive process that involves personal exploration of values and beliefs about power, voice and representation. This includes how to foster strategies to counter the appropriation or ‘othering’ of voices through the research process. Beliefs about the purpose of knowledge and the place of research are entwined within a researcher’s beliefs, awareness, and articulation of power along the continuum of highly contextualized knowledge with active holistic participation to the other end which believes that knowledge can be discretely decontextualized by the researcher (Kovach, 2010). Framing the methods of the overall project as strategies of inquiry allow for the process to meet the emerging needs of the journey as supported through the wholistic petal flower described in Absolon’s (2011) work. Such strategies within an Indigenous research paradigm allow for incorporation of methods and processes that are founded upon the relational accountability necessary for such an undertaking.

Utilizing a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology, based on relational accountability and understanding the journey of *mino pimatisiwin*, the described strategies of inquiry engaged with participants and researcher in a manner that honoured the above. Outlined strategies at the outset of the project included the use of natural conversation, stories, personal location, and journals that moved toward the overall goal of understanding the

experiences of individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry and the influence of Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin on the development of identity.

Natural conversation and stories. In order to develop a relational mechanism within which to listen and interact with individuals and their experiences, I used natural conversations. Although natural conversation may take longer than other interviewing processes, it is a strategy of inquiry that allows for space within which a person's stories and experiences can breathe. It does not place external restrictions on the participant's narrative (Kovach, 2010). Assertion of the power to determine what is to be shared is one example of how natural conversation can be respectful and address power within the research process. It is important for the researcher to recognize their power to shape not only the data collection, but to place importance on particular areas over others through the questions to be explored and to interpret and shape the final work (Thomas, 2005).

Natural conversation supported my aim for relational and reflexive engagement of myself as the researcher in the process, "to intuitively respond to stories, sharing their understandings, and to be active listeners" (Kovach, 2010, p. 125). Within the natural conversation process, I was also aware of the potential for stories to elicit varying responses. The nature of sharing memories also requires the researcher to be prepared for the range of emotions that could be triggered during conversations; this directly links back to the healing and transformative nature of Indigenous research (Kovach, 2010).

As a process for eliciting individual's experiences with the research questions, I employed stories within natural conversations. I chose to engage with stories due to the importance held within ways of knowing, being and doing as described earlier. My

rationale for incorporating the use of story within my project lies within the multiple purposes of stories as well as the power of stories when interacting with personal experience.

Purpose of stories. Traditionally stories have been a mechanism through which to express and convey Indigenous knowledges (Brant-Castellano, 2000). Stories are recounted through ceremonial settings and are repeated in order to teach without intrusiveness. They can guide personal choice and self-examination. The levels to which individuals ignore or apply the teachings transmitted are personal and depend on levels of readiness and ability to accept (Brant-Castellano, 2000).

Stories of families are foundational to understanding who we are and where we come from. Family stories, handed down through generations, create and maintain a deep rooted sense of kinship responsibility (Wilson, 1998b). Time spent with family members listening to their stories is about more than education: rather, it works to transfer a culture, identity, and sense of belonging (Wilson, 1998b). This can provide personal, familial, and community location in relationship to the natural world (Wilson, 1998b).

The purpose of stories is intricately connected to the way in which we come to know our place in the world and answers the question of *what knowledge* is privileged and how to gain further knowledge in a particular area. Archibald (2008) utilizes the term ‘storywork’ as it signifies the active engagement that a story implies. That is to say, story requires that we think deeply and reflect on our actions and reactions while listening to story. There is richness within narrative that signifies the depth of interrelationship involved in storywork. Stories are vessels through which to engage with those around us: they provide a means to pass experiences along to future generations (Kovach, 2010).

There is intentionality and purpose in the telling of stories, and what we choose to share and transmit. “Stories may be for and about teaching, entertainment, praying, personal expression, history and power. They are to be listened to, remembered, thought about, meditated on” (Weber-Pillwax, 2001, p. 156). Conversations, narrative, and reflexivity are inquiry mechanisms through which story can be privileged in order to come to know more about experiences, where the talk is honoured (Kovach, 2010).

Stories as a means to articulate personal experiences. Story honours inclusiveness and belonging; it honours the personal within the collective experience and that within the collective, there is diversity. Our personal stories situate us and through the process of sharing our stories, we support inclusiveness and belonging (Kovach, 2010). A search into the meaning and impact of identity and personal experiences is facilitated through a process grounded within relational and experiential Indigenous methodologies and strategies of inquiry. Natural conversations and stories are strategies of inquiry that are relationally grounded. From Indigenous perspectives, stories can never be removed or disconnected from the teller because of this relational grounding. “They tie us with our past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations” (Kovach, 2010, p. 94). Stories, as a means to articulate personal experience, honours the entirety of a person, including the holistic nature of our places, locations, connections, and relationships in the world. Stories allow for the expression of our understandings, experiences and situated knowledge (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2010).

The subjectivity of storytelling is the very point of emphasis, where the beauty lies in the ability of storytellers to express their own voices and their own terms in the process of the story (Thomas, 2005). It is important that we listen to the words that are

shared within stories; they have something to teach us (Thomas, 2005). “When we listen with open hearts and open minds, we respect and honour the storytellers. I find this process incredibly comforting and respectful. I believe that storytelling respects and honours people while simultaneously documenting their realities” (Thomas, 2005, p. 244). Storytellers maintained the power to determine how their stories were articulated and perceived. This allows for a research process that honours the participants as actively engaged rather than as subjects upon which the process is imposed (Thomas, 2005).

Strategies undertaken in order to reach the goals of this project include natural conversation, stories, and reflexivity as supported through personal location and journaling. Reflexivity within research can be referred to in varying terms such as self-reflection and critical reflection. For the purpose of my research project, I am engaging in reflexivity as a way of making explicit ‘what I know’ and ‘how I know it’ (Hertz, 1997). This is expressed through personal location that is also an aspect of relational accountability and reflective journaling. Reflexivity supports the expression of why this research is important to me (Kovach, 2010). Each of these strategies support the implementation of a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology that, founded on relational ways of being, knowing and doing, build towards mino-pimatisiwin (a good life). Based upon these foundational principles the meaning-making process will be described.

Data Collection

Before tape recording our conversations I met with each participant individually to explain the purpose, nature and intended outcome of the project. When I contacted each Elder, I made introductions of myself and this project. When they agreed, I met with

them, offering tobacco and cloth as protocol. Sharing of food in each of the instances took place which is significant to a relational way of engaging and interacting.

At the beginning of coming together, I provided introductions of who I am, where I come from, and how I am related to my family. These introductions served to connect me to a space, place and family and allowed for a context of my identity and relations to unfold. We reviewed the informed consent forms and addressed any questions. Once informed consent forms were signed, the conversations began. Natural conversations were digitally recorded; and, notes were taken, prior to the conversation, on physical reactions of the participant, and also my reaction to the stories being told (Thomas, 2005).

For both groups of participants, I transcribed verbatim the digitally recorded interviews. Participants were given the opportunity to decide whether they would like to be identified by their names or to be given a pseudonym in the reporting of the project. From this point I shared back with them what I had typed and asked that they make any changes, additions or clarifications to the transcript as they saw necessary. Once this checking in was complete, I worked to get an overall sense of what it was each participant was sharing with me in their storytelling. With this, I went back to each participant to clarify that what I was hearing from their stories was accurate to their experiences. After this was complete, I worked to highlight the sections to include in the condensed conversation format of the analysis. Within this I was searching for a process to allow for readers to sense the context of each individual, about who this individual is and the way that this search has impacted them. While this written extraction of the conversations may never truly capture the relational space that is created as a result of sitting and engaging with people's spirits, I come to the presentation of the findings

section with the understanding that I will commit to capture on paper this experience in a good way, one that honours not only their stories, but also nested within the context and trust that the storytelling occurred.

Meaning Making

Qualitative research methods include interpretive and analytical approaches to find meaning within the research data and process. Interpretive meaning making involves inductive ways of knowing and a subjective articulation of the issue of focus in order to provide insight into phenomenon. Analytical approaches reduce the totality of the phenomenon into pieces, effectively dissecting the issue of focus in order to understand and explain (Kovach, 2010). The latter analytical approach can serve to decontextualize the grouping of the data to show patterns in order to build theory. This reductive manner of analysis does not marry well with Indigenous epistemologies which privilege a holistic understanding of knowledge (Atleo, 2004 as cited in Kovach, 2010).

While there is emerging scholarship on meaning-making generated from inductive analysis, there is little that informs research writing (Indigenous or not). How to interpret and present self-in-relation analysis has not been explored deeply, leaving it open to new ideas. The presentation of story in research is an increasingly common method of presenting findings. Interpreting meaning from stories that do not fragment or decontextualize the knowledge they hold is more challenging. In response, some Indigenous researchers have incorporated a mixed-method approach that offers both interpretive meaning-making and some form of thematic analysis. (Kovach, 2010, p. 131)

The process of meaning making within a Muskego Inninewuk methodology must be congruent with the ways of being, knowing, and doing outlined in the previous sections. This includes maintaining relational accountability and consistency in situating the locus of power with participants. “A researcher assumes a responsibility that the story shared will be treated with the respect it deserves in acknowledgement of the relationship

from which it emerges” (Kovach, 2010, p. 97). A key area of concern within this process of meaning making is the decontextualization that can occur when moving an oral story or natural conversation into a written text (Kovach, 2010; Thomas, 2005). This needed to be addressed in the way that the story is included in the final written project. Second, in honouring the story of another, as the researcher, I had to constantly engage with participants in a process that allowed their voices to determine the outcome of the written text in relation to the expression of their stories. That is to say, there were several points of feedback and reflection between myself, as the researcher, and the participant when the meaning-making process was written in order to ensure authenticity of their voices.

A struggle within the process of making meaning from an oral transmission, from the sharing of a story that is bound and oozing with context and relational, is that no matter the intention and respect of a researcher, written translation results in the loss of an essence. Part of my responsibility, as the researcher, was to create a space within pages of written text to capture as much essence and context as possible to comply with the relational accountability by which we are bound by. Kovach (2010) highlights:

Sitting in the now of story can never be captured through the research transcription, The knowledges that we gather in the ephemeral moment of oral story, as told by the teller, as we sit in a specific spiritual, physical, and emotional place, are of a different sort. The immediacy of the relational stands outside the research, and at best we can only reflect upon it. To make visible the holistic, relational meaning requires a reflexive narrative by the researcher. (p. 102)

Reflexivity was supported through the use of location within the research process in that it allows for space within the project for myself as the researcher to incorporate the relationships that were carried forward, as well as to honour the engagement of speaker and listener. In addition, the multiple points of contact between the participant and myself, as the researcher, allowed for this reflexivity to remain grounded within the relational in

order to honour not only the voices of the storytellers but also the relationship that the conversations were nurtured within.

In order to honour this relational accountability, participants were presented with their interview transcripts to review and approve, allowing them to make changes to raw transcripts and condensed conversations (Kovach, 2010). Presenting of stories in the meaning-making section occur in the format of condensed conversation to allow for participant's voices to be respected. "Presenting data in this way allows readers to interpret the conversations from their own particular vantage points and take from the teaching what they need" (Kovach, 2010, p. 53). Each condensed conversation includes an introduction and reflective commentary written by myself in order to illuminate self in relation to participants and teachings shared that were of importance to me (Kovach, 2010). Second, meaning making occurred through gathering of common experiences of participants into a section that explores connections and commonalities within and across the stories shared in the project.

Limitations

This study was largely limited by time constraints in undertaking the research and analysis. Relationship building with participants is essential within a Muskego Inninuuk methodology, and while this was offset by the sample of participants chosen, in particular conversations with Cree Elders, the ability to engage for longer periods of learning and coming to understand, reflect, and incorporate the stories that were shared with me would have potentially added to my ability to further incorporate their stories into the meaning making. Reconnection with the Elders would have been served better through more time in sharing my understandings of the stories that they shared – several conversations

would have allowed for the back and forth process of meaning making in this respect. Stories, particularly ancestral or cultural stories that are shared in relation to an Elders measurement of where the listener is at, for example, in coming to understand my location and previous knowledges concerning the stories or teachings gifts. Stories are shared based upon what the teacher feels the listener is prepared to take responsibility for. As I am myself relatively young to connecting with Cree teachings, this may have influenced the levels of teachings shared with me for this project. If more time were available for this project perhaps a greater depth of ancestral identity stories would emerge.

An additional limitation influenced by time occurred in the meaning making process. While I worked to be as iterative as possible in clarifying my understanding of each individual's story, and to ensure the portions I included in this report represented their story in a good way, I feel that this process could have gone deeper in analysis. When considering the ability of myself as a researcher to reflect upon their stories in consideration of the levels and processes of decolonization, which I did recognize throughout each of the mixed-blood individuals stories, as well as those of the Cree Elders, meaning making would have been enhanced through either individual or group examination of the stories from these perspectives. Not only would this allow for a greater understanding of mixed-blood individuals engagement within decolonizing processes, it would also work to raise awareness and create community. Bringing together Cree Elders and mixed-blood participants during the meaning making process could also help to identify areas for further examination necessary from their perspectives,

including the role of policy and practice in supporting mixed-blood individuals to re-connect and engage with the relationships to support mino-pimatisiwin.

There is limitation in the analysis interpretation and meaning making of this project in that it is inherently framed within my own subjectivity. While I have worked to be as reflexive as possible within this project, firmly locating myself and providing context for the readers to vision my own experiences and perspectives with this topic, there is still the risk that the meaning making process undertaken; may not be a valid reflection of the experiences of participants. The power of an individual's story lies in their own expression, vocalization and interpretation of that story. To add complexity to this is that individual's stories, memories and reflections change and evolve.

In seeking out these experiences and stories, while sharing similarities as a researcher, I must also acknowledge that they are based upon layers of context and variability with relations and situations. This project does not seek to generalize participants' stories, but rather create space and avenues for sharing points of connection, relationship, and understanding of experiences.

Summary

This chapter outlined necessary aspects incorporated in a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology founded upon Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing in order to explore the development and processes of mixed-blood Cree individuals in coming to know the essences of who they are in relation to everything and everyone around them. This methodology is founded upon relational ways of doing research, sharing of stories through natural conversations that centre the experiences of individuals as meaningful sources of knowledge to be honoured and shared. Through the

implementation of the above methodology, the following chapter will be an expression of the stories of participants. Processes for making meaning and coming to know from the stories shared through this project include condensed conversations from each participant and common experiences as understood through Indigenous perspectives of identity, decolonization, Niwâkomâkanak (all my relations), and mino-pimatisiwin (a good life).

Chapter Four - Meaning Making

Introduction

Thomas King (2003) shares that all we are, are our stories. Our stories are all that we are. He reminds us to be careful with the stories that we tell as they can never be taken back. They can never be erased from existence. So I am reminded of the care and attention that needs to be paid when I share a story. I need to be mindful. Our words, what we speak is powerful. Our stories are powerful. They can incite hate and fear, or they can promote belonging. Our words can torment and cause pain to ourselves and others, or they can work to heal and nurture. And in the end this is our choice.

I choose to take you on a journey with me through stories gifted to me in conversations with individuals who have explored experiences of identity connection and disconnection. Some stories are about me, some about us and some about the possibilities that lie ahead. In these stories of healing, reconnection, remembering and decolonization, there are threads that create and signify relationships. Attached to these interconnected strands are people we may never meet in our life time, but who have experienced similar events, have seen similar things, have thought similar thoughts, have lost the same opportunities, mourn disconnections and missing relationships, and yet still choose with everything in their being to move forward. They are those who have not lost hope.

The process of undertaking a search into the experiences of individuals as they uncover explorations of who they are in relation to the world around them, and the impact that this has had on sense of self and well being has taught me a great deal. Participants have shared with me their strength and commitment about speaking the truth, about awareness, perceptions, and powerful reflective journeys. Sitting in conversation and

reflecting upon the stories shared has taught me about hope for healing of future generations and creating a space of belonging.

Elders shared with me teachings and stories how, as mixed-blood Cree, we can come to reconnect with the core of who we are, how we can work to reawaken what has always existed inside of ourselves. Participants shared with me identity awakened within their own being. They opened to me a sacred space, their innermost selves, sharing with me their deepest questions, insecurities and yearnings. Sharing with me their resilience, strengths, and influential relationships. These lie at the core of our wellbeing. Participants truly gifted me with intimate pieces of themselves that have deepened my understanding of journeys towards awareness, wholeness, and healing.

Conversations for this project took place from March to May 2013 and ranged in length from 45 minutes to 4 hours, some taking place over several interactions. Seven individuals in total shared stories related to the development of a Cree identity. Four individuals identify as possessing both Cree and non-Indigenous ancestry, three are members of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Manitoba and one participant's family comes from Peepeekisis in Saskatchewan. Three of the participants reside in Winnipeg, Manitoba and one in Kelowna, British Columbia. The Cree Elders were identified to me as people who hold specific knowledges and experiences recognized within their community. Each of the Elders originated from First Nations in Northern Manitoba, but currently live in the Winnipeg area. Sitting with each individual was a powerful and at times emotional experience. Natural conversation necessitates that I exist as an active, reflexive participant in the data collection processes. This creates within itself a depth of exploration and rich relationally grounded understandings of who we are, not only in

relation to each other but also to our communities and the overarching responsibilities that come with these interactions.

The presentation of findings will occur in three sections. In the first section the focus is on presenting the findings of the Cree Elders. The second section will introduce and present the stories of mixed-blood Cree participants. The third section will present threads of common experiences.

In conversation with Cree Elders: How do we come to know who we are?

This section will present stories from conversations that took place with three Cree Elders: Don Robinson, Wilfred Buck, and Belinda VandenBroeck. First I will introduce each of the Cree Elders and will provide a summary the overall conversation. Next I will present, in condensed format, the stories that were shared with me. Finally, I will reflect on what I took away from their stories in relation to the original question: How do we come to know who we are as Cree peoples?

Don Robinson, an Elder from Bunibonibee (Oxford House) Cree Nation, is someone I have been connected with through my work in the University of Manitoba. I was introduced to him in 2008 through the Indigenous Caucus in the Faculty of Social Work. Over this time I have witnessed the patience and kindness Don shares. In this way, I have felt very comfortable in conversations previously with him. At times I have shared my experiences of re-engaging in my Fox Lake community and the struggles I have experienced within the University and in the work that I do. I met Don on campus one afternoon in between his appointments for forty-five minutes.

Don shared with me experiences of disconnection from the natural progression of identity development through processes of colonization. He was removed from naturally

existing systems that nurture belonging and membership into a different way of life that did not support his mino-pimatisiwin journey. Experiences of disconnection were intergenerational. This was influenced by his father's harsh parenting style (suspected to be influenced by residential school experience), and subsequent unlearning as an adult within his own parenting style that needed to be undertaken as he became a father himself. Don summarized the healing journey he has undertaken facilitated through traditional teachings of the journey of life. This allowed him to undo the impacts of trauma within his being. He now shares that journey with other individuals to order to influence and facilitate healing journeys in the work he does with Indigenous peoples. Don shared necessary elements of healing which directly relate to the foundation of identity. The first area is the concept of consciousness. We are a whole being, that our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual are all connected. Second, we need to think deeply about our lives, about ourselves in relation to everything and to recognize that we have power within our own selves. It is with this power that we can move towards mino-pimatisiwin. While building upon these areas, Don indicates it is also crucial to know yourself, to explore and become aware of who you are as a being in relation, which includes honouring of the total of the person you are. This is connected to ceremony, to land, to spirit. Don reaffirms and emphasizes through the interview the connection that exists; not only to where we come from, but who we are as individuals in relation to the world around us. We are strong and whole beings, and it is a matter of reconnecting with this truth.

My early experiences of childhood were growing up in a very traditional society, in 1951 when I was born. There was an extended family system that took care of each other, Elders, and children, and intervened when there was a crisis of some kind in the community (a fire or a death). They took care of each other. I grew up like that with many relatives. I had the Cree language encoded in my brain, and I grew up with that identity. I knew my grandparents, maternal and paternal, and I

was connected to them, for the first 7 years of my life, until my family moved away from the reserve. Then I started to have my identity affected, first by going to school. I had begun Grade 1 in Oxford House, and was taught in Cree. At the age of 7, I began Grade 2, when we moved to this English speaking community. I started Grade 2 in this new school not being able to speak any English at all. I was immediately placed back to Grade 1. When the teacher would ask me to do something, I didn't understand because I didn't speak English. So I started getting strappings for not responding, when in fact I wasn't understanding the instructions. I think they thought I was being disobedient and disrespectful. For the first year I got quite a bit of strappings in front of the whole class. So I did not start well in this school, because I was afraid of the whole experience and afraid of the teachers. I never did well academically after that, always getting 51% to move to the next grade. I subsequently quit school in grade 8 and began working.

So I had that experience of being affected by the school system. I believe that my identity was altered then, when I began to feel like my language was not very useful in this new world that I entered. So then I didn't speak Cree as much and started speaking English all the time. But the language is still in my brain. So I never lost that language. In my middle childhood, my parents started having struggles with alcohol and family violence, and became involved with the child welfare system. So these family dynamics affected my life, my siblings, and my parents. At the age of 16, I developed rheumatoid arthritis, which affected me at a critical life stage. So all those things kind of knocked me off the mino-pimatiswin pathway life. I didn't have a very good life, I had a very difficult time living with arthritis and coping with extended hospital stays away from my family. I discovered alcohol as a good pain reliever and I started drinking to excess as a habit. So that affected my identity as a young person. Anyway, I will fast forward to 1984, I began a sober life style and to upgrade my education. Subsequently my learning pathway lead to university. When I began to have a clear mind, I knew that I wanted to learn from the Elders. So I started going to ceremonies where I learned from the Elders. I was looking for answers to guide me in my journey of life.

I started to find Elders that were talking about this journey of life, and what is supposed to happen when you are born, when you are a child, when you are an adolescent, when you become an adult, and when you become an Elder. That's the journey of life I started learning about. I came to understand how because of colonization, I never experienced that good life. I experienced a different kind of life. And so then I started to understand the reason why my father was the way he was. He was affected by the residential school experience in our community. My family and many people in my community were affected by residential schools. I believe that is the source of those teachings of punitive discipline. That's the only way he knew how to parent, and so he parented us in a harsh abusive style. So I started unlearning all the negative teachings about life, and I started to learn about the good teachings. When I became a father myself, I wanted to teach my children good things and to be proud of who they are. So I started teaching them about

living in this modern world, the sweat lodge, and the Sundance. After they became teenagers, they have a choice and could choose to follow the traditional path. They also had a choice of following the mainstream education way. So they both attended university and have both graduated. Maybe someday they will go to the Sundance with one of my children already thinking about it. It's all now a part of their consciousness.

So we think, we feel. We feel, we think. Whenever we have any stress, we carry it on our body somewhere. We carry it in our body. So that's what consciousness is. Consciousness is becoming aware of the whole human being, becoming aware of our self, and becoming aware of all of your relatives.

The elders used to say "Mamitoney ni ta" which means really think about your life. "Mamitoney nihta mowin" means thinking deeply about your life. That means think about your values. That means, part of when I do counseling, I get people to think about their life. To think about how they got to where they are today. Say they are struggling with depressed, low self-esteem, struggling with addictions, struggling in a bad relationship. Get them to think about how they got to be there. From their past. So they have to deconstruct that whole past and make a new life. They have to make a new life. They have to reclaim their consciousness... People have to be aware of their power. They have power; emotional, mental power, physical power, and spiritual power. When a person realizes their power of "ti pe ni mi sowin" (Cree word meaning self-determination).

So in the old days, and even today. People go fasting, and that's how they get to know themselves through this ceremonial meditation. That's how we used to meditate a long time ago. Today we need to get away from all of this rush of life, and all the technology. It is spirituality just going for a walk in the bush and sitting with nature. The traditional fasting is an opportunity to just be with the earth, reflect and to think deeply "Mamitoney nihta mowin". Then you get to know yourself. "Kiskinomisown" is a Cree word that means to know yourself. So that means you know yourself as a man, you know yourself as a woman. Then you look at what information do I need to become a better person. I am okay the way I am. But I can be better.

Reflection

When I sit with Don it feels as if I am connected with someone who senses in many ways the experiences that I have gone through in the searching for belonging and internal validity. Through the sharing of his struggles and how he has come to today in his journey serves as a reminder for me to be patient, to be kind to myself and others, as we

are always beings in progress. Moving, healing, struggling, and through it all committed to a search for answers. In order to reconnect ourselves within this journey of life we need to come to know who we are, where we come from, and recognize the power that we hold within ourselves. It is a complex and necessary undertaking, this undoing and unlearning of what we have been taught, what we hold within us that is holding us back in such a way that stagnates our potential growth. Through unlearning of internalized hatred, of coping mechanisms that detach us from those around us and reconnecting with our history, our family, and our stories, we can influence not only ourselves, but our children and those around us.

The concept of consciousness is an important nudge for me, cuing me to the way that we carry stress, hurt, pain, anger, sadness within us, on our physical bodies, in our spirit. We carry not only our own, but those of our families, our communities. Through consciousness we become aware of these connections and can move to address what we carry. Reflecting what Don shares of identity and a search for belonging, there are connections to the internalization that takes place when individuals have been disconnected from their histories, family and ancestral stories. In order to undo the impact of the trauma on our internal sense of self we need to think deeply about how we have come to where we are today, and to deconstruct judgments and myths that have been internalized. Through this we can reconnect to our inherent personal emotional, mental, physical and spiritual power. We must become aware of the strengths we possess, to call upon these and move through the doubt, the fear, the questioning to a place where we are reconnected with our authentic self.

Wilfred Buck, an Elder from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, is someone who I have met on several occasions at seasonal feasts. He is connected to me through several people in my social and work circles. I have known Wilfred as someone who does important work as an educator and traditional knowledge keeper in Manitoba. I met with Wilfred one morning over coffee for a little over an hour to sit in conversation.

Wilfred shared with me stories of his life journey, stories of struggles faced in order to come to the place he is in his life right now. He shared the impact of disconnection and trauma upon his wellbeing and the manner in which he came to be reconnected to *mino-pimatisiwin*. This provided an important foundation for understanding his life's purpose and how he can use his gifts to fulfill such a responsibility. Wilfred connected his healing to a reconnection with spirit and the centrality of this connection to fulfilling his life's journey. Coming to know who we are, as connected to spirit, the names that we possess before we come into this reality is a manner for us to reconnect with *Atchak* (spirit). Wilfred shared that it is necessary and natural for us to look at our selves, to want to grow, to want to know where we come from. This commitment towards awareness, acknowledgement and growth is necessary in our own personal healing journeys. Deeply intertwined within the healing journey described by Wilfred is the centrality of spirit in all that we do. This connection provides a base from which to understand self and self in relation to all that is. Everything is connected. Sometimes it is not important to ask why it is connected or in what manner the connection is occurring, rather, to understand that there is the connection itself. An important reminder Wilfred shared with me is that we need to take care with our expectations. Pre-conceived notions can be dangerous; and, we need to work to remove

these from the way that we view the world around us. At the end of the conversation Wilfred worked to reinforce that we need to know and acknowledge who we are and where we come from. This is the place for healing to begin.

So in that whole process, of trying to find my place, the place that was given to me, the place that I was supposed to take up, and the job I was supposed to do, the central Atchak, but with Atchak comes some other stuff. And part of that other stuff is who we are, what's your name, not my name Wilfred, but my name given to me by the grandmothers and grandfathers, by the spirits. When I came from that place up there, I was known by another name... to paraphrase that, they turn it into Dream Keeper, so that's part of who I am and what I do... I was given the responsibility of understanding dreams.

(P)art of that job is to help people with their dreams. Part of that job is to show people, show people that there's a way that we can go about it, being who we are, in a place like this and still keep who you are. Because for a lot of people that's really hard, they have difficulties, with they can't walk in two worlds. It's not walking in two worlds, you're existing in reality. Your spirit, for our people, spirit, the dreams, our physical reality, they're all one. They're all the same. There's no separations. So it doesn't matter where we are, it's all one. And like I said before, the physical place doesn't really matter, it's where we are within our selves. And where we know we belong, not where we think we belong, but where we know we belong.

I guess for everybody this is a different path you follow that links to your personal experiences, growing up, what happened to you, how you feel you become disconnected, and what it is you are looking for. When people talk about identity, identity it's a very broad concept. But for people who want to grow it's Ne-na, it's me, that's where you have to start. Like your grandfather said, you have to remember. So the first thing you do is you have to remember. And from that base it's built. So the memories of what we have, of what happened to us when we were young, the things, like when I remember right away, I remember my grandparents, and some of the things that they taught me and how they made me feel. And they're the ones that brought me back.

It starts with remembering your grandparents, remembering who your family are, if you have that opportunity to remember. The place, the physical place is not that important. It's your space in pimatsiwin, your space in life, and that connection you have to it. So the space can be anywhere, the physical surroundings can be anywhere. Just as long as you have that connection with that spirit. Because Atchak is everything, the spirit is everything. It's the starting, it's the ending, it doesn't matter where. Because it's everywhere. That's the connection. And once you get that, because everybody has that, it's just that a lot of the times we haven't worked at it, to make it strong. And once you get it strong, then the other

spirits will know, and they'll be put in front of you to help guide you along in what you're supposed to be doing. Because we all have something to do in our lives. That's the job we have, we have to find out what that is, and we have to do it.

So in regard to identity, identity starts with Atchak. Atchak, the spirit, is central in everything. Because the spirit is Creator. And the cosmology of our people, it says we are Atchak. We come from Atchakosuk, we come from the stars. And when Creator made everything, Creator made Atchak, there's a part of Creator in Atchak, the spirit, so inside of us there's a part of Creator. And that's called Atchak. And the rationality goes that there's a part of Creator inside of us, Creator never dies, therefore that part of us that's Creator, inside of us, never dies. We are beings of realities, we transcend realities. We are a part of Creator, and Creator knows everything, therefore there's a part of us that knows that. But our human reality at this place now supercedes part of that. Because the very central part of that is we're stubborn, and that clouds a lot of stuff.

Everything's connected. Everything's connected, it's just that you got to understand the connection. It's not the connection that you need to understand, but you need to understand that there is a connection. Everything and anything, when you talk about Atchak, spirit, Atchak is energy, we're beings of energy. We come from up there. Another reality. We come here to this place, to this world to learn something. As beings of energy, we don't know touch, taste, fear, smell, hate, laughter. All that, we don't know that stuff. We come here to learn that stuff, and for some people, for some spirits it takes a very short time. But for others it takes a long time. And whenever we are finished learning what we come here to learn we go back up there. And we go somewhere else, learn something else, do something else. One of the things you can equate that to, I like to equate that to is quantum physics. Everything is energy. Everything, all the possibilities are there, and will happen. Same with us, we are beings of energy, we come here to learn something and all the possibilities are there. We go back some place else, all the possibilities are there, because we are connected, we are all connected, because of that spirit. Which is Creator, so no matter what we do, we can deny it, or we can accept it. But we are connected, with everything. Everything that is made by Creator is connected to us. And in that connection we have influence over everything and anything, and they have influence over us. So the reality is that we are responsible, as all things are responsible to us. So everything is responsible for everything. And we all have our jobs to do, no matter how miniscule, how large, how earth moving or mind shattering it is. We have a job to do. If we do our job properly, if we do our job to the best of our ability, then we move on forward, smoothly. And more revelations will come to us, because its never ending, our job is never ending.

So we have to be mindful of that, our expectations, our preconceived notions, we have to let that go, and realize we are talking to human beings, on a human level. When you go in to ceremony, we are speaking a different language, we're

speaking on a spiritual level, there's spirit. When you're sitting in a sweat lodge, it's dark, why is it dark, because you're trying to get rid of the physical world, you're speaking on the spiritual level to each other. Everything has a purpose, you talk about doing your doctorate on advocacy of women, everything has a purpose, the spoken word, a prayer, it influences the cosmos, everything that comes out of our mouth influences the cosmos, doesn't matter how minute or how profound. Every thought that you voice, every song that you sing, every prayer that you say, it goes out into the cosmos and it influences. Atchak, it influences the spirit, that's why a lot of the Elders are mindful of that, when they speak, especially when they are asked to speak, usually they introduce themselves. Tansi... my name is this, I am from this place, that is where I am from. That establishes who you are as a spiritual person, and where you're from, what areas you're from.

Reflection

The idea that we have this sense within ourselves, this intuitive knowing of where we belong speaks to my own struggle to understand this idea of identity. Feeling and sensing, but not having the words, the concepts, or the ability to articulate what this meant in my reality. Wilfred reminds me that we are not separated, disconnected, fragmented or compartmentalized beings. We are not necessarily required to disconnect self from one thing in order to exist as a part of another. We are whole, existing within reality. This abashedly contrasts an either/or dichotomous understanding of mixed-blood identities. We contain within ourselves memories, experiences, emotions, connections to people, places, spirit. Each of these are important to re-engage with in order to heal our disconnected selves. When I was sharing with Wilfred what journey brought me to this research area, and in particular the name of my project, I shared with him the dream of my great-grandfather.

One night in the winter of 2009 I was in that time just between awake and asleep. My great-grandfather was standing on the rocks on the banks of the Kettle River, by the rapids. He looked at me and asked Kikiskisin Ná? At the time I had no idea what this meant. I awoke with a start and wrote it down as best as I could,

repeating it over and over out loud so that in the morning I could ask what this meant. (Rowe, November 2009)

This dream began an affirmation for me, a question within me was constant, aching, asking, “Do you remember”? The time that I sat with Wilfred he shared with me many concepts that were new to me. There are layers that I need to work through in order to come to know what this means to the journey of identity. I feel that these are important areas and at the same time I realize I am still processing my own understandings about Atchak in order to know confidently the teaching that exists within. What I do know and trust is that I can sit with what has been shared and that as new knowledges are introduced each day my learning is continual and relational. Through experiences, interactions, relationships, and dreams I will continually build on what has been shared through these gifts.

Belinda VandenBroeck, an Elder from Opaskwayak Cree Nation, is someone who I have heard about in my social work circles, but had not met previous to our conversation. She has however, been connected to my community. She used to live and work at a hydroelectric dam development camp (Manitoba Hydro) in my community during the establishment of Limestone. Belinda and I had supper one evening and we sat for over two hours in conversation.

Belinda shared many stories. She took me through interconnected understandings of identity and the criticality of the current situation for Indigenous peoples, particularly youth. Belinda began by sharing her cultural foundation, the experiences which supported her development as a child, and that influenced the way that she knows who she is. Belinda shared experiences of connection, being raised in an environment of love with her granny in particular, and how this made her feel safe and like home. Foundational to

these early experiences are the intergenerational gatherings that occurred on the land in the summer time, when families would come together. These memories allowed her a keen sense of where she came from. She shared memories of her grandparents and the ceremonies that took place. At the time though, she did not know what these were, because they were not allowed to practice in the open, and so she only knows what they may have been in retrospect and through memory, an example would be a full moon ceremony, and how the full moon now make her feel. Belinda shared many examples of personal, familial and larger nation impacts of colonization, particularly highlighting internal hatred (a feeling of not liking who you are), shame, racism, and judgments. There are differences in the way that generations of the same family can experience the process of identity, reconnecting to the essences of who we are, where sometimes reconnection does not ever occur. Necessary to the development of a strong identity is knowing where we come from and who we are in relation to the world around us. This is an important healing journey that can take time, sometimes many, many years. It rests upon us as Inninew (Cree) to have these conversations, change these experiences, change our future and the future of our grandchildren.

First of all, in my life I'm born at home by a midwife, so I'm born into my culture. I'm born into who I'm supposed to be as an Aboriginal person. You know there's some Scottish there, and some German. Because my dad was German, and my mom, so her dad was German and my granny was Cree but also Scottish, see? But there's no part of that in our life. There isn't any bagpipes, there isn't any haggis or whatever. That's not anything we know anything about, so we don't associate with that. That's part of who we are, but not what we associate with. So I grew up, I was, I was brought up with my grandparents.

So I grew into my language, my way of thinking. I could say my Cree thinking, but I don't even like the word Cree anymore, because we all need to start using the word Inninew, cause Cree is French. And I don't know what the heck it means, but it doesn't mean who we are... I grew up with that, in that environment of love.

I slept with my granny every night, her back and my back. Big flannel blanket of goose down feathers and just cuddling. And we had around our bed the mosquito net, all the way around the bed. And so I slept against the wall, and my grandmother there, and it was just the safest place in the world.

For the summer, and that was our holiday. And all our grandparents came and all our aunts and uncles and all their kids and that's how we lived. And we lived in love. And I didn't even know there was other tribes of people that spoke other languages. I didn't know that until I got to residential school.

So we just, so I remember those things. And I was telling my adopted, I had an adopted daughter. And I said ... and it just came out of the blue, and I said on a moonlit night, on a full moon, it just, I just loved that feeling, and I don't know why. And I said I remember many nights walking through the bush, with lots of trees on little trails. And she said I bet you and your granny were at a full moon ceremony. But I wouldn't know that, and I wouldn't know that was going on.

Well not only that, but my parents, my grandparents were both medicine people. My grandfather had the dreams of what to do, and my grandmother would go on the land and get ready for what he had to do for the people that were coming. And my mom tells this story, who hates anything that's traditional...for her to come to such a moment of, a time of hatred within. And I think ... human beings, it's like we don't know how to love ourselves. We always will believe some bullshit. You know that's like from 100 years ago, why the hell are you still living from that? But that's what we do.

I went for training at Neechi Institute, I wanted to go somewhere where there was Aboriginal people for training, I didn't even know if there was such a thing in Canada, but there was... Monday morning we were sitting in our circle talking away you know. And then this guy walks in, young fella. And everything goes quiet, and so you got my attention. Okay, I'm ready. So he walks in and he sits down, there's two chairs for him and that young guy. And there's something in the middle of the circle, I have no idea what it is. And then he says you can go ahead and light the smudge. Smudge? Okay, the only smudge I know are the two pots we put on the fire to keep the mosquitoes out at the house when I was growing up. That was the only smudge I knew.

Okay so the guy goes, and he lights it, and holy crap. I went oh my god I can't believe it. I smell that and I knew exactly where I smelled it that last time. In my grandmothers' house, not the one's that brought me up, but my mom's parents. So I knew. I went oh my god, I know where that's from, I know where that's from. And so I went, it was just like I was home. I was home. I knew where that came from. And at that moment I know who I was... I'm 28. And I'm thinking, why at that moment, this was way after, way after, so what was it that made it home for me? Was it the smell? Is it the smell that dictates who I am? Is that the smell that tells me where I come from? Because at the time that's how I felt. I knew I was

Aboriginal. I knew that, but to say that I had a culture with ceremonies, well if there was we didn't see them. It was against the law anyway, so they couldn't have had. So everything that my granny and grandpa did, they had to do behind closed doors or out in the bush so we wouldn't be able to brag about it to somebody you know?

And my mom was a strong woman, she was mean, she was cruel, she was frank, like very frank, hard working, never scared to speak her mind. We all got that from her, all my sisters were like that. And when she knew me and my brother and my sister, there was only three of us that found our traditional ways in our family. And she didn't like that, but she didn't say anything. Not until that one time when I was 56. And then it was like, wrong day to say it mom. (laughter) Anyways, I just said to her, mom that's not true. How can you do that, how can you call your own people, that's your mom and dad that followed those ways and you still say that. You're gonna follow white people and what they say about us? Because when I first, especially when I quit drinking, and then finding my culture a year later. I knew I was home, in my heart and my spirit I knew where I came from. And so is that identity? To me it was, I knew where I was from. And I knew where I belonged, I knew I belonged somewhere. I wasn't being kicked around anymore. I wasn't you know, what about this, and oh the Christians say this and they say this, and you know. And it took me 10 years to undo the colonization in my mind, 10 years. And I'm a smart woman, I'm an educated woman.

My grandparents never ever said things like that, because they had to be careful. So in the years that I'm in residential school, I have nothing that tells me who I am, as belonging to a culture of any kind. Because remember that's not what they wanted you to be anyway, in school. So, apart from knowing that I was Aboriginal, and that I'm from the Cree Nation I really didn't know anymore than that. And in the time I was in residential school, I lost my language.

Like how do you deal with that as a young kid, when you're supposed to know from day one who you are. And you don't. It's such a sad thing, you know?

I have three children, and they don't know their history. Because by the time I thought that I should be telling them. Because the apathy is so strong, it's so strong. And that's where these kids are at, you know, dressing like gangsters and following the black people and how they dress. Anyway, but by the time I wanted to tell them, they didn't care. It didn't matter, and I felt so sad. So sad.

And the thing here, our way of life has been such a culture of shame, of shame of who we are. And if the white people don't feel like they have shame, when they make us feel ashamed, they feel ashamed.

But they don't think that. Just, just think it's like this (points at herself) but they're a part of it, they feel that ugly feeling. And why would you want to continue with that ugly feeling anyway, like give it up already. And in my life it

took me a long time, even though I can stand up for everybody and anybody, And when it came to me I didn't. So what's up with that? For me I didn't feel like I'm worth it, what is it? So then I had to really, like my teaching is, I got it from my grandparents, you gotta always tell the truth.

And I'm thinking oh my god, when is it going to end? It will be ten lifetimes before it will end, because our kids don't know who they are, they don't know where they belong.

It is important to me as a human being from one human being to another. Cause I want you to love yourself, I want you to feel good. I don't care who you are, just feel good.

To me cultural identity is so, it's something that we have to talk about all over. You know why is there shame in who we are? That's been hundreds of years, hundred of years. When will that stop? You and me have to stop this.

Reflection

The roots of who we are lay entangled within the thorny chains of colonization. The thorns reach through the essences of ourselves to our core. They tear into and distort who we are, and pretty soon looking in the mirror, we can begin to loathe ourselves, wanting to crawl out of our skins, disconnect ourselves from everything it means to be Inninew (Cree). This is the black hole of internalized colonization. We need to work to free ourselves, to untangle, and to reconnect with our essential selves. Self-love is a critical component to this healing, i.e. to be able to love ourselves, this can be facilitated through intergenerational connections to family, grandparents, and community that can teach us who we are, and where we come from.

This section introduced the Cree Elders that I sat in conversation with, in order to come to understand how we, as Cree peoples, can re-connect with who we are. Within the presentation of the condensed conversations they shared their personal stories of healing and growth and teachings related to wellbeing. Through these teachings I was able to

reflect on how this is connected to my own search for healing, decolonization and resurgence.

In conversation with mixed-blood Cree: A journey towards healing

This section will provide an introduction to the four mixed-blood Cree participants who sat and shared their stories with me. I will introduce one by one, and will provide a summary of the overall conversation. Next, I will present, in condensed format, the stories that were shared to come to know about their experiences, struggles, and methods towards healing. Finally, I will reflect relationally from my location on their stories in connection to the original question: how do individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry experience their identities? This reflection will support an analysis that incorporates Mamtoney nihta mowin, shared by Elder Don Robinson, where sitting in deep reflection is a necessary aspect of coming to know about ourselves and ourselves in relation to an experience.

Originally, based on literature reviewed, I made assumptions about disconnection from community of origin as a necessary factor in determining participants. Shortly after connecting with individuals about the project, it became clear to me that feelings of belonging, membership, and disconnection for mixed-blood Cree individuals were not necessarily separated along the on-reserve/off-reserve boundary. This is reflected by inclusion of two participants who lived largely disconnected from their First Nation, and two participants who lived largely within their First Nation until adulthood.

Kelsey chose to use a pseudonym in the presentation of her findings. Kelsey and I have known each other for the past six years, we began working together in the summer of 2007 and have developed an important relationship since. We have maintained a

friendship and connect with each other in a regular basis. My request to Kelsey for an interview was a natural progression, as the idea of identity is something that we have discussed due to similar circumstances with mixed ancestries. The interview took place on two occasions, once at her home and the next at the University. In total both interviews were four hours in length.

Kelsey is a woman in her mid-20's and is a non-status individual whose Cree ancestry comes from Peepeekisis, Saskatchewan. Her mother is a Status member of the same community, something that she was unaware of until 2007. In her family there was not commonly discussion about their Cree ancestry. She grew into an adult largely unaware and disconnected from personal, family and larger Aboriginal history in Canada. As an adult her awareness began expanding. This impacted the way in which she began to identify herself. She shared the importance of her maternal Grandmother in undertaking these conversations, to learn the history of her family and to begin to make sense of the historical impact of legislation and Indian Residential Schools in disconnecting her generation from these stories. Kelsey shared the impact that internalized colonization, racism and stereotypes have had on the development of her understanding of her identity experience. Her siblings and herself may have the opportunity to apply for Status according to Bill C-3, but Kelsey has expressed that she has come to a point in her learning where she does not need a certification or approval from Bill C-3 in order to know who she is. Kelsey was raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba and in her adult life has reconnected with her family's community, a process that has been healing and created opportunities for connection and growth across several generations.

As with other participants, clearly identifying within a particular identity category is difficult and in asking for feedback, Kelsey shared the following:

I guess the only thing that is difficult to explain in demographics or in the interview is how I identify. I do agree that I identify as Cree currently but as we discussed in the interview, it is hard to label myself as solely Cree because of my other ancestry and family connections. However, it has been very empowering and important for me to identify in this way. Okay so maybe keep this but if there is a way of summing that up than I wish I could use that. (Personal communication, May 2013)

Kelsey shared numerous catalysts that have provided opportunities to uncover, explore, and reconnect with a history and ways of being that had not previously been a part of her awareness. Each of these provide insight into the experience of an individual, nested within relationships, working towards healing and finding the words and space to assert who she is. Relationships, a summer internship, and post-secondary experiences are highlighted within Kelsey's stories.

I guess I will start from what I can think of as a point in my life where I really started to explore this, you know, was after my grandfather's death in 2007... with his passing I just realized, okay, I was 21 at the time, and I realized, I don't know a tonne about his early life, and it's not like I didn't talk to him about things, it's just, I don't know why I didn't think of asking this, maybe it's also being the youngest, that having an effect on that... it also made me realize, okay, but I have my Grandma here, and she's still here, and I haven't asked her these things, and I don't know much about her life growing up on the reserve.

It's kind of sad that I hadn't actually been to my home community, but never mind like, like living in Manitoba, there's reserves not even an hour away, and I totally was completely unaware of it, totally in my own urbanite world. Um, to really being aware of skin colour (laughs) or reserves, or what was going on, you know if I ever did hear any thing it was snippets of bad things, horrible going on, and I was like what are they even talking about?

That first summer it was like processing through this, I think, like I think your identity is also like looking back on what your actual physical traits were, and I guess that's where I went to first for kind of like understanding of where I fit in.

I guess to have this idea when I was a teenager and growing up, you know, no, I'm cool, and I'm colour blind, everybody's whatever, I don't really care. I had a

friend who was Aboriginal, you know (laughs) like whatever. But not really understanding or exploring that piece of me... I think that first summer was really tough, because it really forced me to.

And at the same time when I was going to communities and doing research my Grandma was staying with us, and then she would ask me, "oh what Indians did you go see this week?"

It was like this natural way of beginning to talk about her life. So that was really, really powerful.

And it's so great to have that connection. And I guess just going with my Grandma and then going with my mom, it was like, I guess I was talking about before, like me starting to look more into my identity, starting to look into what has happened in our family. It kind of pushed my mom, and kind of pushed my aunt, she was moving toward that direction too. You know you don't realize you need to bring it up, you need to ask, because people don't like, oh I should tell you about my childhood, or I should tell you about this. Unless it comes up in conversation, it's not something that people tell you about.

And I didn't really realize that at the time. It's just funny when I think back to the time, and reflect on where I am now it's like oh my gosh I feel so silly not really understanding these things, but I think I've talked to you about this. And I've talked to other people who, you know, when I was in my undergrad, and even in school right now, in social work. Like when do you really learn about this, when do you really learn about Aboriginal history? When do you learn about residential schools, I mean it's kind of coming out more now. Or learn about hydro, no, you don't learn about hydro, you have to go seek that information. And I think that's just really unfortunate you know, because we're all kind of kept in this bubble and fed this information. And I mean people, like Aboriginal people are used as kind of the scapegoat and it's just really, really frustrating now to think about it. But I can't be really angry at myself from that early point. Like before the summer and growing up, and having these thoughts about, like this internal racism towards myself and this racism towards Aboriginal people and this, you know. Because it's like, that's what I was taking in, that's what I was taught. You always heard about people being drunk, or don't trust them, or panhandling, you know. They're so different, they're scary, They're not to be trusted. All these different ideas, they are just fed into you and it's just very frustrating to me. It's like, after that summer, it's like I want to go into history and that's what I want to explore and I want to explore specifically Aboriginal history, and that was a big piece, it was really good to explore that and understand that more. Because you know, I've taken other history classes, and you don't learn about these people who were here before these other people you know.

When I think back to it, no that was exactly where I was supposed to be at that point in time, at that point in my life.... you're developing into the person you're

being during your teen years, into your early twenties. I think I'm still growing. I think I'm still learning. But such a big point in my life where it's like, I think ya you start to question things about yourself, and you want to know more about your family, you want to know more about where you've come from, you know, and it's just interesting, because it was just a natural process of getting into that, and getting to know more about her. Because I remember just little snippets, like, I remember her saying things like, oh I hated the nuns, and I was like what does that even mean, and I was like oh what a terrible school she was at, you know, like I had no idea. So it was like the process of learning about her life, and understanding what that is, but also having the context of from what I was learning about residential schools, learning about Aboriginal history, learning about hydro, learning about different peoples' communities, and how complex that is and peoples lives there, and I mean it was just, it was so much in four months.

That was a big piece, was going back to the community. And it was interesting, because I went with my aunt, my maternal aunt and my mom, who at that point had never been to a reserve. So, ya it was just really kind of crazy, and kind of it was a huge deal.

I don't know if I'm very good, but this one woman she was like wow you're really light on your feet. And I'm like really, I always thought I was clumsy (laughter) you know that's like really nice, you know. It was a very great experience in that dance class and just so natural in a way of connecting with people. And I also became a lot more comfortable with smudging. And (practicum supervisor) was a very good teacher in the sense that like why we do certain things, and going through that. And I think when you don't know much about something it can feel uncomfortable. It can feel awkward, you don't know, am I doing it right, am I doing it, you know. But having an understanding of why you do things, and then going through it, you realize, I mean when I first started really smudging. I mean I remember being nervous and thinking I hope I'm not the person who has to start the, you know put the bundle together and light it. Because I'm gonna drop the shell and people are gonna be like, get out of here. You know. But it was so great to see like everybody took a turn doing that, and we all go in a circle and she explained why we were doing it. And she explained why it's, basically like a prayer and you can use it to help focus and protect and all that kind of, cause she talked about the different parts of our bodies and how we can cleanse ourselves and how we can protect ourselves. And I remember going through the physical process of it. It's kind of like a meditation, it almost like, I don't know, surreal. And I, it's very calming, and I've never experienced that sense of calm, like when I've smudged, so it was really great. Because she was able to connect me with that. And I remember she would invite me to things, like she said I'm going to be having a moon ceremony, and she runs those, and I'm like, I've never been to a moon ceremony, you know. And so participating in that and we met people from different communities, and it was so incredible. And people would introduce themselves with their spirit names and they would explain

their experiences with this ceremony and some people would say this I my first time here, and some people would say they haven't been coming, they haven't had time, or they felt like they hadn't had time and they said it was so good to get back to doing ceremony. And I remember being very welcomed and very accepted. And it felt very good being there. And the case manager, I ended up driving out with her and her family. It was so incredible, I almost felt like another piece of their family going out with them, you know. She was also very good to me too. And I remember it was like the first couple of days kind of meeting her, and I kind of explain kind of my journey and my understanding of identity and she's like ya, makes sense, everybody goes through this. She comes from kind of a mixed heritage as well, you know people don't talk about that or they don't address it. It's so funny how you can connect with somebody just, they get it, they completely get it, cause they've gone through the same thing. And yet I realized that she is at a different point than I even am, and I realized wow, she's incredible, like this really strong woman. And I remember when were at that moon ceremony, and she introduced herself with her spirit name, and kind of explaining herself and understanding. And I was like wow, it just felt so, it felt intimate, but I felt so honoured to be there.

I mean my father is British ancestry and some Scottish, you know. And he didn't really understand what I was going through either. And I don't know, I think I also kind of, when I think about it, you know I never really thought of myself as Aboriginal, because I thought, oh I'm so watered down. You know you think about blood quotients and you think of that. It's just so ridiculous. I'm not really Aboriginal, because people have been with other ethnicities and whatever, so what is there really left in me, you know?

And you know it's so confusing, you know even the whole idea of acknowledging all of these other pieces of our identity, it's the same thing if you think about last names, you know where have our mothers gone, you know and that's where my Aboriginal ancestry came from is my maternal side. Although when you were talking about your Grandma, and not knowing her ancestry, I know on my mom's father's side, there's Aboriginal ancestry I learned, but they didn't acknowledge it, because they were really, really against acknowledging that.

I was having these conversations with her, and I was struggling with, how do I know, understanding this identity, struggling with am I Aboriginal or am I not, you know and this struggle I think is actually a really good point for you to go to a naming ceremony, because I think that will be really helpful for you. Because I think that is maybe the next piece you know that could be really good for you. And I was like okay – phew, okay I'll do it.

I said, I'm like I really, really struggle with this, with like knowing myself, and feeling comfortable, and knowing who I am and understanding my culture and understanding more of a spiritual piece of my life. And they were like okay, let's pray about it. So they were praying in their language. And then they told me my

name was carries a pipe woman, and I was just like shocked. And I said to them like are you sure (laughs) but I don't mean to be disrespectful. I mean of all the stories and teaching I know about the pipe is very significant and I know it's about knowledge and I was like are you sure.

They even told me Kelsey, you can have a drop, like even when you are talking in blood, like you could have a drop, like this is who you are. Kelsey don't do this to yourself. I was like, okay, okay. I gotta always remind myself, and I know its such a struggle. But I have to remind myself that no one else defines me but me. So I just need to apply it. So ya, it's still a struggle, that's kind of where I was at.

Reflection

Kelsey has shared many layers of experiences in her story about how she has come to know and experience her mixed-blood Cree identity. She has shared internal struggles where she compared herself to the image of Aboriginal that exists externally within society. Her measurements of herself resonate with me, as I too have succumbed to the dangerous grounds of internalizing expectations and stereotypes of others into my own being. Kelsey discusses frustrations as she reflects on her upbringing and the lack of information that would have supported her to understand history and colonial events in Canada. She felt that this is something that would have supported her experience of her own identity. When I have reflected on my own development I also have been frustrated, angry, and sad at similar lost opportunities. I reflect that it took me until adulthood to figure out that an important piece of me was disconnected, and to begin undoing the impact of colonization.

When Kelsey shares her catalyst of beginning to search and re-engage, a summer internship in First Nations research, it reminds me of a sometimes tongue in cheek point of reflection that I made about my catalyst, when I reconnected with my father at the age of eighteen:

I am a card carrying authentic 100% genuine status Indian according to the Canadian government. As of the age of 18 – when I finally figured out this may be the case. I sent my application away, received the okay – went to a skyscraper building in downtown Edmonton – filled out another form and waited in line for the woman at the counter to take my picture. I sat there – a scared, naïve little 18 year old girl/woman waiting for a card to tell me who I was. Little did I know that in that moment I was beginning a journey that I would carry with me into today. I was beginning a journey that created questions in me – no more was I simply Canadian – I was a member of Fox Lake Cree Nation.

But what did that mean to me – that young little 18 year old girl sitting in that office in Edmonton that day? It meant that I was claiming a piece of what was rightfully mine. A piece of my father's history, that while I always felt connected to – I had no idea where this journey would take me. That is the beautiful mess I was reclaiming.

I speak about reclaiming sometimes – to those who are closer to me (not many) and what this means to me. I have too many questions and a lot of shame that doesn't allow me to openly ask in order to begin my journey of answers. (Rowe, August 2011)

Within this journaling it also hints at the deeply intimate exploration that can occur with mixed-blood Cree individuals who have been disconnected. It can be filled with shame, doubt, fear, and longing. I feel this within Kelsey's story as well.

A final connection I will make relates to Kelsey's struggle with determining a word, or words to use in identifying, as it has been a difficult process for me through my development, until this past year;

Perhaps this is the largest piece of all. For within my existence, within my reality (as this project is engaging with myself and the questions that I have tried for many years now to answer) is what about my wellbeing as a woman. I have narrowed it down to a Cree woman. I even sit and look at the words on the page for a long while and then add the word Scandinavian. So as an Irish/Scandinavian/Cree woman. Or shall I say Cree/Scandinavian woman? Or Cree/European woman? What do I identify as, what is it that I am? (Rowe, August 2011)

I have come to know that expressing myself, healing, and decolonizing has been a process and a journey, not an easy one. I have moved through several layers and stages of reflection. I see this in Kelsey's story as well.

Mary Ann is my sister, daughters of different mothers and the same father. In total there are five of us siblings, disconnected and connected. Mary Ann and I grew up into adults without experiencing many opportunities for relationship building. It has been within the last several years that we have established and continue to build a relationship as sisters. I am connected through my spirit to her and while we may not know the details of each other, in many ways we continue to learn. When I hear her voice or think of her, when I remember the way she sits with my children and bonds in her beautiful way, I smile. I am lucky to have been given such a strong sister.

Mary Ann is in her early 20's and is a Status member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. She grew up away from this community. She has been raised in both rural and urban environments in British Columbia with early years spent in the North West Territories. She identifies as mixed-race and when asked about her background, she shares with people that her father is Cree, but reflects that she never has explicitly identified herself as Cree.

And it's wanting to, like it's the weird sort of ache that you feel this part of your life has to be involved, but then also not feeling, doing it to feel more like yourself but also at the same time you have this constant sort of tension and sweating and like you know your not even though you're there you're never really comfortable in anywhere you are, right.

Mary Ann attended and participated in traditional ceremonies as a child and into her early teenage years. Mary Ann shares different stories to highlight her emerging awareness of identity as a young child, including experiences of tokenism or being put on

the spot. Also within her school experiences she shared the emotions that bubbled to the surface at different points in high school social studies class when students openly shared stereotypes about what it means to be Aboriginal in Canada. She feels that her inability to be clearly identified as Cree creates awkward situations. These experiences also draw Mary Ann's attention to her personal privilege that exists as a lighter skinned young able bodied female and examines what this means in relation to her expressions of Cree identity. Mary Ann has graduated with a Bachelors degree in Fine Arts, and has at times used arts and creative mediums to explore her experiences of Indigenous identity.

That would probably be after I moved down back to Princeton from the North West Territories, like probably around 6 or so. Cause then my mom started taking me to Sundances every year. Like well, I think we did it before in the summer, but it was kind of like a yearly ritual and so we, I'd do the powwows. But then whenever I came back to Princeton I would like, in my kindergarten class, my mom would dress me up, and be like Maryann's a fancy dress shawl dancer and so I'd like do it for my class. And that's, it kind of like when I was a little kid when I realized I had this other like thing that I did for show and tell and like I could bust out and it was kind of a novel thing and people used to make me do it at like assemblies or something. And people would know, like I was the only...

G: Were you the only one?

Ya (laughs) in like my elementary school, so ya they, it was kind of like a tokenism, now that I think about it, but it was kind of cute and funny, but so, but I was a little kid, after I moved from the North West Territories, cause up there everybody's Inuit, and not so different

Not so different? So when you did these types of things, did you find it was comfortable, or was it uncomfortable? Or did you notice?

I think I was kind of proud to be able to do this,. But it was also kind of embarrassing... now that I can think back at it now, I do remember being like kind of embarrassed about it. But I did like to perform and do that sort of thing, but it was kind of weird, well especially when I was older, too, like when I was like 11 or 12. We were doing this filming project and it was about, like, there's one lady teaching kids how to do like tanning and stuff. And then, like oh Mary Ann can teach you like how to Powwow, and so there's scene of me, and I didn't have any of my ceremonial gear, so it's like me with a blanket, trying to teach these people how to crow hop. So it's like these little girls and it was like the most,

like looking at the video it was like so ridiculous, and so ya, trying to teach these people how to crow hop, it was weird looking back. I remember watching the video and like I couldn't theorize about it as much as I can now, but I remember being like oh my god, like this is awful.

You know its weird for me because, this kind of verbal communication of identity... I used to go to the Sundance and powwows every summer. But when I became a teenager, like when I was an older teenager, I was like screw you mom, you know this is dumb ... there is no community connection for me in British Columbia, because everybody's in Winnipeg... as soon as I wasn't doing that anymore I didn't have a connection with the community, and so all I had was ... knowledge of certain traditions and these memories. And you know my heritage, but without the verbal communication or acknowledgement of these things because I was severed from this community activity that I had done. And what was the meaning anymore... Like I haven't connected back. I always want to in the summer, but ... when you kind of sever the community connection, it's like, you find yourself in this sort of ether.
(laughs)

I really want to do the Sundance this year, like I really, really, like I think I might be too late in preparing for it, um, but I really like, it's my total dream to go back there and like do it, and re-foster that connection, and once I kind of get back into it. Cause I remember how I, well how I stopped fancy dress shawl dancing was when my mom, when I grew out of one of my uniforms, and I needed one for when I was a teenager, my mom paid the lady and she spent all the money and never made it. And so like we just didn't have enough for another outfit, and so like, that skipped a year, and I couldn't go compete anymore, because I was so out of practice and I feel like so, just, ugh, when that happened because I used to love doing it some much, so ya, that really sucked. But I do wanna like ya, I wanna make the, and I don't know if its just like idealizing it, or romanticizing it in my head, but I really wanna go back and give that a try

I guess I always feel like I don't really know if I have an in anywhere, and there's lots of ceremonies and stuff, and there's actually like a sweat that's going on, I just got an email about, put on by people from the university, but I never feel like, I always feel like when I go to these things, I'm out of my community and it's hard to put yourself out here and be like hey I'm here too to do these things.

I really am interested in exploring that Indigenous aspect of myself and having, like I do feel like I have, it is, it aims to be a part of my wellbeing. Like even having the support structure like I did, like my mom was, you know as a white woman, she was always very, well when I was younger she was more intent then dad was to keeping me in touch to my native heritage, right, then dad got into it, but she was the one that felt it was important for me, or that it was going to be important for me. And it was, right, so it did help foster my wellbeing, it helped make me a well rounded, a sort of well rounded person, or trying to be anyways,

trying to get there. Um, but ya just I think it really, like I know I'm always coming at it from the perspective of wanting to be maybe more, like understand more, but it also makes me feel very enriched, and it makes me feel good to know that I am part of this continuous thing. Like when I read certain things in books, it just makes me feel, or when I am learning certain things that just make me feel more connected to communities and peoples, like I haven't even engaged with, and sometimes I don't feel like self confident enough to, ever. But it does make me feel, I don't know, good.

I think for me I feel very, I feel like I've been born with kind of like a silver spoon shoved up my ass, like to put it in the most basic sort of terms, like I feel like I can absorb all the benefits of white culture, especially being like a young passing for white, standard kind of woman, but then also kind of have this knowledge of legitimacy, and sometimes I'm kind of like, I think like this is kind of the worst way to put it though, is like I can be like, oh no I'm actually different and I have these other qualities that, I'm not you, and I'm not the oppressors, and so I feel like I can flit, I feel like I can discuss in both, like for my benefit, like I can use it for my benefit, which is really kind of a terrible way to put it, but that's kind of what I'm thinking when I think my darkest thoughts when your not really supposed to say aloud. you know I can make both work to the advantage for me. And I do, like I think I do. Like when I am talking and when I want to seem legitimate, and I do, and I'm like oh well, blah blah blah blah blah, and I'm like where did that motivation come from to, I do I play at both and sometimes that also like a complex guilt thing where like, cause like if I had the self confidence or whatever, you know would I need to do that so much, I don't know?

I feel like I kind of reap the benefits of, especially with school and funding and stuff, because I know I grew up where I did with my mom, like of course I was going to go to university, of course that was what I was going to do. And I just have to realize okay that I have this attitude because I was in this context and maybe people who should have gotten funding or money or whatever, didn't because it wasn't the same sort of thing you know.

But I think that also comes from silver spoon up my ass-dom where I do have these privileges where I am somebody where I've never really had a problem being listened to, like if I'm talking to people, just because I'm loud. And also people pay attention to me because I do, I pass for certain notions of what people, wanna, like people listen to me or like talk, and just because people have that certain personality, or just because of the way that I am, or dress or are, that people kind of engage with me in a legitimate sort of way.

And it's wanting to, like it's the weird sort of ache that you feel this part of your life has to be involved, but then also not feeling, doing it to feel more like yourself but also at the same time you have this constant sort of tension and sweating and like you know your not even though your there your never really comfortable in anywhere you are, right.

Have you seen Lana Del Ray's video and she's wearing the big head dress, and I'm like um what did you do to earn that, I'm pretty sure that is a ceremonial male, usually male artefact, that you shouldn't appropriate like that, and that's pretty offensive... so you know I'm always like, where I always have this double paranoia where I'm always like if I do anything like that, like it's not, like not like I'd wear a head dress or anything like that, but say if I wanted to re-engage in powwows or anything, like I wouldn't look enough to fit the part. And it's a constant stress that I might make somebody else feel uncomfortable because I'm not like, you know...

And it's like super, it stresses me out sometimes

Reflection

I have found that we share similar experiences in relation to understanding our Cree identity and difficulties (internal and external) that arise due to particular disconnections which have produced similar results and questioning. At the time when I was developing this project, I always had in mind to ask her if she would share with me, in order to allow me to gain insight into her experiences, but I was hesitant, I was nervous, and in my dreams an answer to my questioning came:

I dreamt last night that I was traveling, walking across the country. My suitcase was attached to my body. I packed my suitcase well in advance – but when I opened it when I got to Kelowna I didn't have everything I needed inside. I had forgotten my shoes (I was wearing a pair, but had intended to pack more) and I had forgotten my toiletries.

In my dream I journeyed. I walked across the country from my home in Winnipeg to BC. It was quick, and smooth, and there were not any obstacles. I made it there quickly. I went to look for my sister first – I found Mary Ann – I was looking for her in town – by the Lake, at a café reading a book. She was surprised to see me, and I think I looked different, because I had to say – Mary Ann, it's me Gladys, your sister. She was surprised and excited that I was there. She said I could stay with her, as long as I needed. This is when I said, wonderful, I just need to change my shoes and went into my suitcase to find I didn't pack any other shoes. I was wearing a skirt on my journey and my suitcase was tucked into my skirt.

Her house was right by water, a beautiful clear crystal blue lake and then she jumped into the lake. When she climbed out, we sat by the lake and dipped our feet in. At that time, two other women came to Mary Ann – younger women –

travelers. They were looking for someplace to stay. Maryann welcomed them, and said you can stay, as long as you wear the skirts that are inside for you. You will find your skirts inside (Rowe, November 10, 2012).

This dream allowed me to see the healing of my journey was necessarily connected to Mary Ann; she has something to share with me, she possesses a gift and we are connected. This allayed any nervousness and solidified my resolve that I was traveling a good path in my project and that I could move forward to connect with her.

Connecting as sisters who were disconnected as a result of colonial events has not necessarily been an easy process, as we live across the country from each other, are at different stages in our lives and have not, until recently had many opportunities for connection. While at first this reconnection may have felt forced, awkward or distant, we have moved through these stages to engage in a way that has fostered connection and has been a healing process for me in particular. Mary Ann teaches about her experiences, her perspectives and asks questions that within myself I also ask, that allow me to reflect on my own. For example, our relationships with our father took place at different times in his own life journey and sharing these experiences has allowed some of our own understandings of this relationship to unfold. We have had several conversations about experiences of our mixed identities in the last few years.

When Mary Ann describes her experience of feeling invisible in classroom situations and feeling frustrated at judgments of others and how it feels uncomfortable to identify herself in public encounters, these all speak to my own experience in my journey of coming to know who I am. I too have felt this internalized agony. The struggle to feel like she belongs and to make the first step to participating in ceremonies that she intuitively knows are important to her wellbeing is something I continue to struggle with

as well. I feel that there are safer places where I have been invited to participate that have fostered my healing, but to put myself out there in other gatherings is a stumbling block I continue to work through.

Drake chose to use a pseudonym for the presentation of findings. Drake and I have known each other for the past six years and have developed an important friendship. We have built a strong foundation and have consistently supported each other. Drake came over one spring evening specifically to have this conversation. We had supper and started the conversation. We needed to take a break here and there; it was an emotional sharing and powerful. The conversation lasted about two hours.

Drake is in his mid 30's and is a Status member of Fox Lake Cree Nation in Northern Manitoba. He grew up largely in his community, but is now located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. His background is Cree and Caucasian and was raised by his Cree mother. Drake identifies as Cree and Caucasian and expresses that feeling *claimed* by either of these sides is not something he has experienced. He feels like the lightness of his skin makes his mixed-blood ancestry very apparent and that this external visual can at times impact the way that others treat him in varying situations. Drake shares stories of racism and stereotypes and how he has internalized or fought against these impositions to assert his identity. In many cases he has been reminded openly of this mixed background in a derogatory manner that excludes him from one group or another.

Drake has been influenced largely by his connection to his maternal great-grandfather and grandfather, who have provided a deep-rooted connection to his Cree identity. He describes a period of his life where he was searching for a place to belong amid various experiences of exclusion. Drake's understanding into his experiences of

lateral violence and trauma coupled with his perspectives of both Cree and Caucasian backgrounds have added insight into the healing journey necessary for community-hood, nation-hood and belonging on an intergenerational level. He feels, until he has some closure or connection to his father's family, this may never actually occur. Drake worries about the transfer of his experiences to his children, in particular when they are even fairer skinned than he. He is concerned about the experience that will occur because of this and works to build a foundation that will allow confidence in self-identification of Cree personhood.

The first time it was brought to my attention, I was living in. I was actually back in Fox Lake. It must have been in grade 2. Ya, it would have been in grade 2 when we lived back there. And somebody called me a dirty Indian. And I didn't know what it was, and back then, at that time I was a kid and I didn't know. I was a kid, so I just said they are teasing me, they are teasing me, calling me dirty. And it's really hard to say when I first knew what my backgrounds were. It was maybe late adolescence. In grade, maybe, it would have been before I moved to the city. Maybe grade 4 or 5. That's when I started to realize who I was. I knew I lived on a reserve and I was Native. And at that point that's all I thought I was. I didn't know I was part white. I knew who my father was, because my mother talked about him. I knew what he looked like, but still then, skin colour didn't mean nothing to me. So I grew up, I grew up Native. Back then before it was taboo to say it, I was an Indian. People would ask me and I would say I'm an Indian.

At first I didn't know any different, but then as I got older things started to change. Because like I said people would make remarks about the Cree side, people would make remarks about the white side. And it started to bother me. When I started to understand what racism was, it really started to bother me. You know. And I would sit there, I sat there with my Aboriginal friends, and they would make remarks about white people. Come on now, you're putting part of me down. You know, and I'm supposed to sit here and take this. This is who I am. That's when some of them, "oh you're Native, you're Aboriginal, we don't care about that side of you, we don't see that side of you"... This is who I am. You're putting down a part of me... It didn't hurt as much. But when non-Aboriginal friends would make comments, that's where it really hurt, like painfully hurt. Like why would you say that about me. Because I identify with that side more, right. And it's like growing up, I start to not feel like I fit in anywhere.

That's where everything becomes lost, because of Christianity, our own people didn't know who they were. They were shunning their own traditions and cultures.

It wasn't until your father was talking to me, about my great grandfather, and telling me these stories. Because I never knew him. You know, so the influence I have from him, is just memories of other people. Generosity, like I am a generous person, and it's because of a man I've never met. I'd like to believe that us as Aboriginal people are like the greatest people in the world because of who we were meant to be, who we were supposed to be. Accepting of everybody, generous, we cared about everything around us. You know my aunt, like I'll go back to the generosity part, you know she's a poor woman, she struggles. She used to always make a lot of food. Every time she cooked, a lot of food. It would sit there. A lot of it would go to waste. It would sit there. I used to ask her why she always used to do that and she told me that my great grandfather taught her that. It doesn't matter how much you have, always cook extra just in case somebody less fortunate than you comes over and needs to eat. Same thing with my cousin, always giving. Always giving, and he didn't have much. And I asked him the same thing, why do you give away so much. He goes because, there's always enough for everybody. That's what my grandfather taught me. Of course which was my great-grandfather right.

And he always tells me, you remind me so much of him. The way you look, the way you act, and how you present yourself to people. Just the way you think and everything. I wish I got to know this man. He died when I was a baby, so I never had that chance.

I seen a non-Aboriginal counselor, she's white. First thing she told me is oh, you got problems, you're crazy. I looked at her and said you're not even supposed to use that word. I said what kind of a person are you, you are supposed to be helping me get my head on track, and you're telling me this and that, and that I probably can't amount to nothing.

So much was happening in my life then, I was travelling all over the place, and doing this and doing that. And I couldn't talk to people in our own community because they like to blab. And some of them even made accusations. Like I was going to go talk to this one woman who used to come to our community. And everyone kept saying she's good, she's really good to talk to. And it was during my depression. I didn't do drugs, and I didn't even drink. But you know I was malnourished, I was under weight, and my skin was pasty white. And I walked in there and the first thing she said, before I even get to introduce myself. She said how long have you been doing drugs. I said excuse me. She said how long have you been doing drugs. I said I don't do drugs. She said you don't have to lie to me. I said what reason do I have to lie to you, I said I don't do drugs. She goes when you're ready to be honest with yourself come back and talk with me. I was so angry.

I was just thinking outside, like I try and identify with my people, my Aboriginal side as much as I can. But being half has a big impact on how I think. I try to be compassionate about what we've been through in life, but sometimes my white

side will kick in right. And then it gives me a different understanding. Like I know our people are trying to fight for what's ours, like what was rightfully ours from the beginning right. What we believe was supposed to be ours. And, but I think the way we do it nowadays is not right. You know. A lot of the times, a lot of our fight is based on race. And I look at them and think, like earlier I said you can't fight racism with racism, all it does is build up that wall that's already there. And when I'm listening to other sides, I just want to tell them, you know. Shut up we need to find a different way. And I think if I was all Native, I think I would have a different mind set.

So I look at that. I think it's those values that we remember we have, but we don't follow that keep it strong for me. I want to be those people. I want to be that person... But I think that people fight for their rights, you know people, doesn't matter if you're Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, everybody has rights. And our people were given these rights, because we traded off our land, we said okay you can use this but this is what we want in return. Those are rights. They are rights we expected in the past and we expect them to be followed and now they are being taken away. So I struggle with identity, like who's right, who's wrong. And at what point is either side right or wrong.

That's what has an influence on how I feel I should be. Even though there are struggles in my life, because of being, I believe it's because of my mixture, and it comes from the struggles of the adverse effects of my mother and my grandparents. I still believe in those values. We talk about them all the time, that is the biggest influence on who I wanna be and who I should be. And I don't know if I would have those thoughts if I wasn't Aboriginal. You know there's a lot of pros and cons to it. As far as, as much as the struggles are in life because of my mixture, my Aboriginal side has a big influence on who I am.

I know of him, I've seen pictures of him, two of them. That's all I've ever seen in my life. And I still remember that picture. One picture I remember clear as day. It's so vivid in my mind. My sister knew him. My older sister. All I remember is that he was this tall guy, skinny, blonde hair. And he's carrying my sister. You know skin pale, and he's holding on to my sister. And that's the picture I remember of him. And I still remember it. I don't know where it went. I remember having the picture, my mother gave it to me. And I held on to it. I think she gave it to me when I was about 6 or 7. And I held on to it. I always wanted to know who he was, where he was. I was young, and didn't know how to do it. And then I was in high school, I think I was 19, and I tried to go back to high school. And I did. And I started dating someone in my class. And internet was a big thing back then. You can connect anywhere, right. So I started using that, and she was always around me. So I started to search. Do all these searches. And I could never find him. But I found my grandfather on his side. That's who I was named after. The number and his address there, phone number, was all there. And I had it. I wrote it down and I had it. And I was terrified and terrified to use it. And my girlfriend at the time tried to encourage me. And she even called him once.

Without me knowing. And finally I got the guts to call him. He knew nothing about me. So I talked to him for a bit, and told him. He knew of my brother on my dad's side, who I still don't know. Every now and again I will try looking for him. But he knew of him, he just hadn't, there was nothing, he knew nothing of me. I don't know if it was because he didn't want to, or, cause I knew my mother left him before I was born. And, ya. The old man didn't even want to get to know me at all. He didn't even try. He said nope I can't help you, I don't know where your dad is. I haven't talked to him in years. And I said well, you can't give me anything. And he said all I know is that he is somewhere in Alberta. And, ya. So I thanked him, and I said maybe I could call back, and he said no, there's no point. I was like wow, so I never tried again. He's still living there, he's still alive.

I mean he is my blood (laughs) And I've searched everywhere. I've went into forums, looking for my family. Because my last name is kind of popular in the French area. Well my dad's last name is kind of popular in the French area, but, even my lineage. I went back to see what kind of names are related to us.

I think until I meet my, if I ever get the chance to meet my father, or at least my brother. I don't think my life will ever be whole, complete. Because that's a part of me that's missing, that I know is somewhere missing. Maybe that will, maybe if I do meet them, you know it will give me that sense of belonging on that part of me. Whether they accept me or not, at least I made that attempt, you know. It will be something that, a door I can close if I have to get my closure on it. Cause I know that I come from somewhere else as well, and I'm not complete until I figure that out, or maybe I never will be. Maybe at some point I'll just accept that it is what it is. But at this point in my life I need that closure, and I don't have it. And I won't for a long time. Because I know they're alive.

And because I'm mixed blood it even makes it more important, because I have to be accepting of both my selves.

She gave up on forcing me to go to school and all that. And I wonder if it would have been any different if I wasn't Aboriginal, or even if I was raised on my father's side. And I question it. A lot. I question where I would have been if I was raised somewhere different.

Because if I wasn't, because like we said, how would it be if I was living the other side. Maybe if it was the other side that raised me, I wouldn't follow the Aboriginal, if some one didn't support me I would push them out of my life and say, well I don't need ya. You know.

Even now, like I still don't fit anymore. Especially after my last experience with home. After all that stuff that went on with my wife and I. There was a comment made about me on Facebook, by one of our members. It said, oh his white ass, he's not even Indian and he thinks he knows what to do for our people.

The hardest part of that too is, me, my family, my family line is Fox Lake.

Right from the beginning my family line is Fox Lake, they come right from the York Factory Band. And then we have all these other people who came in who weren't part of the band. First of all they weren't part of Fox Lake, they came in, got voted in for whatever reason. And then you have a whole bunch of them, their family lines come from Fort Severn, right. And they're not even original people. Yet they're the ones holding power over us, and telling us we don't fit.

And it's disgusting, that's what it is. Like your father always talked to me about my great grandfather. Telling me stories about him, how big of a person he was in our community. I tried following in those footsteps. Trying to be that person, and still can't get accepted.

And it's very discouraging, and now I don't even want to go home, at all. (pause) I don't even want to go back to my home, my own home. I don't feel welcome there.

But then the people who have been there, will never see you as part of that, right. You are always an outsider, if you are not full, you are always an outsider.

It makes life hard. You know one part of me tells me I am better than that, I can do anything. I've proven that many times in my life, and then all that negative stuff comes to me, and it just discourages me and I get depressed and I feel like I can't do anything.

Reflection

Lateral violence, exclusion, and feeling like an outsider are all experiences that I share with Drake. Feeling disconnected, not claimed, like I don't belong in my community has scarred me deeply. His experiences of lateral violence, relegation to status of outsider at various times have added to my understanding about the historical trauma that continues to ripple throughout our community. I reflected in a journal about my experience with exclusion, but a connection that I still felt:

My experience working for "my community" it broke me mentally and emotionally – never really feeling comfortable, safe, settled – always on the look out for when someone would recognize me as an outsider and kick me out with nothing to show. It was like a need – an urge to go back to my community – to help – I knew the effects of intergenerational trauma on both my parents and I

had to do something – but in the end it felt futile and hopeless. (Rowe, August 2011)

Drake shares the impact of internalization upon his self, feeling hopeless, worthless, like he is not connected, and depression. I also feel the impact of this internalization in similar manners. I reflect on this disconnection from my family and the impact it has had on how I am in relationship with others:

It boils down to being able to be vulnerable, intimate and un-perfect to those that you love – and being okay with this. We have not been taught how to open ourselves up to the ones we love in this way. In fact with me personally I have developed quite a repertoire of coping mechanisms and mental gymnastics in order not to be vulnerable. I clearly know how to assess a room of people to ensure my safety, I rarely allow more than a handful of people to know who I really truly am (and even this has taken years of breaking down walls). I think that this is an important question. (Rowe, June 2011)

For both Drake and I, this ability to be seen as vulnerable is still a struggle. Perhaps this is a combination of mixed-blood experiences of shame and disconnection coupled with intergenerational impacts of colonization?

Shawn and I have known each other for the last six years as members of the same community. We have connected infrequently in various community gatherings and social settings. He agreed to sit and have a conversation with me after being referred by a good friend of mine.

Shawn is a male in his mid-thirties. He is a Status member of Fox Lake Cree Nation. He grew up largely in the traditional territory of Fox Lake Cree Nation, moving to the city several years ago as an adult. Shawn's ancestry is Cree and Caucasian; however, he has not connected with his paternal Caucasian family. We met one afternoon and discussed my project and how this connected with myself. He then agreed to meet for the purpose of sharing his stories. He knows of my family within Fox Lake, and has some

sense of my background and connections which helped to support his context of the project. For the conversation we met for just over an hour and a half.

Shawn shared internal and external difficulties when trying to acknowledge and balance all aspects of his self and the complexities of an individual's identity. His grandfather in particular influenced the development of his understanding of being both Cree and Caucasian. Early experiences in the school system were contrasted within high school where unequal treatment and opportunity was the norm. Shawn shares stories from across varying ages where his mixed ancestry was brought to attention, and times where a mistaken label was placed upon him and it was of little concern, to other times when external assumptions have left him feeling frustrated and unrecognized as a whole person.

But I find that when lot of people look at me, they notice that I do have Native in me, and they ask that first, are you Native or part Native? I'll say well I'm part Native. And they'll be like okay. Sometimes they'll drop the subject, or sometimes they'll probe more. Because like you said, sometimes that does help with identity. Even though I could say I already know who I am. you know what I mean? Growing up this is what I used to say, I'm Native on the inside, even though I look white on the outside.

Shawn shares that while he portrays an external persona that appears to be unphased by the impact of these interactions on his wellbeing, the internalization of society's expectations continue to impact his sense of balance and wellbeing.

There was times when I would sit there by myself and say to myself, how would I actually, how would my physical features look if I was full Native? How would my physical features of me look if I was full white? But if I was full white then I wouldn't, it's hard to explain this. If my dad wasn't white, then I wouldn't be me, I would be a different person. Same with my mom, if I was with my dad, and I didn't have a Native mom, I would not be me, because I'm different.

Shawn likens external expectations to blinders that need to be removed, where individuals need to be willing to remove the blinders, to expand their awareness of people

as a total and whole being, rather than the compartmentalization or forced choosing of sides. In order to function within mentalities that force him to choose, he also makes a choice, to blend in when and where he can. That is to accentuate or highlight those aspects that best blend into where he is at that moment, “like a chameleon”.

I guess you could say a lot of, a lot of that, trying to figure out who I was, was during school. A lot of it was in school. I went to school in Sundance and I had to take a bus off the reserve. I find, like, if I was outside my body and I see a bunch of Indians come up, and then this white looking boy come up I would be like (confused look), what’s wrong with the picture? But than on the other hand, even the teachers know that I was Native, but I did have mixed blood. So thinking of that, but the school back home. I know now that they were fair. It didn’t matter if you were Black, White, Green or Blue. But I see now that they were fair. but I used to argue about that with them back then. The only Native teacher that was there was Mrs. Massan. And I would bring that up, you know why is everyone here white and she’s the only Native teacher, you know? I used to have little arguments like that and get myself sent home. But other than that, I do know now, they actually did treat us the same. You know, you had your groups of Natives here, you had your groups of whites here, and they were treated the same. And then I’m sitting here in the middle, and you know what side do I go on? I always had my group of Native friends growing up, and I always had my group of white friends. But even now I find that, like for an instance, if I hang around with my white friends, they know I’m Native and they accept me for that, they somehow, like I know that, I tell them I’m half Native. Some people actually thought I was actually Asian. But back to my story, they accept me for who I tell them I am, for me that’s fine.

I do know that, it’s hard to explain what I’m thinking right now. But it’s like I always found myself in the middle between the two groups. Even though I was accepted by both sides. But myself I found, like, who do I belong to? You know what I’m saying? Do I belong with them, because I lived with them all my life, or do I belong with these guys because I look like them? Do you know what I’m saying? So I used to think, even at that young age, I was already into science, even thinking about already what at that age that little brain should not be thinking about. So I used to think, I used to think, what if like somehow I could duplicate myself. That would be so great, because then I could hang out, because some of these people in each group did not like each other. Do you know what I’m saying?

All I can say is if my grandpa was still alive, he was always there. He always kept me on, I guess you could say the forward path. the right path. He did, for me, he didn’t try to push me to understanding who I was. The way I saw it he helped me to help myself to understand myself. You know what I mean? Does that make

sense? Cause not only on finding my identity, I always used him to help me out. like a side story, like he helped me find out who I was at the time, when I was learning about the birds and the bees. That's how my grandpa was. But he always, the thing I liked about my Native side growing up I used to like visiting the old men around the reserve... Those guys, they used to sit around and tell stories. And they used to, interesting, I used to like that. I used to think, when they used to tell me those stories, it would be so awesome to be full Native sometimes, you know. Because look at the life, they lived a rich life, Natives lived a rich life like that, they lived off that land. They knew how to do that. So that's how I got into like, hunting and trapping with (name removed)... He was just somebody who would come pick me up, okay grab your snares, we're going out. He pretty much taught me how to do all that, you know living off the land type thing. I'm pretty glad my pops, well I used to call him pops. I'm pretty glad that he showed me that way, but he also showed me that you can't depend totally on the land, because of, you know he only went to grade 6, he was a smart guy. Smart enough to know that because of modern days, you can't live totally off the land, you have to, exactly what he said, you have to blend in to society. No matter if you're Native like us, white, no matter who you are, you have to blend in. That's something I remember him telling me. You have to blend in with today's society in order to live. So growing up, finding out who I was. I would say my grandfather was my biggest influence. And he is still today, even though he's gone.

And my grandmother, she was somewhat the same, but she was really like, more or less, if you wanna be, if you wanna be like a Native, you have to live like a Native, you have to learn your language. Which is like I said earlier, something that's hard for me to do, even though I knew it, like if you were to talk to me in Cree, I would have to sit there and listen. And it would take me a while to interpret what I think I'm listening to. And my grandma and she could ramble off as fast as (snaps fingers) you know how they are. She would be like oh ya, okay, um ya, okay I'll do that, okay, I'll go do the dishes, I knew what she meant, okay, I'll go grab some eggs from the store, I'll go borrow some flour from big granny, eh. But she would say it in Cree and I knew what she meant. And then when I listen to my mom talk, I'd be like (confused face). You know I'd have this question mark, trying to understand what she was saying.

But I find that when lot of people look at me, they notice that I do have Native in me, and they ask that first, are you Native or part Native? I'll say well I'm part Native. And they'll be like okay. Sometimes they'll drop the subject, or sometimes they'll probe more. Because like you said, sometimes that does help with identity. Even though I could say I already know who I am. you know what I mean? Growing up this is what I used to say, I'm Native on the inside, even though I look white on the outside.

Well when I'm talking to somebody, its always the same. No matter which way you say it, its always going to be the same. I'm white but I'm Native, I'm Native, but I'm white. Ya I've grown up on my Native reserve. I'm mixed breed, I'm half

and half, but I choose to be both. You know what I mean? That was always the same. But to myself, for me, if I look in the mirror for an instance, I would look in the mirror, if I have to look at myself I would say I see myself as being more Native even though I try to sit with society, with the rest of society. Or sometimes I'd be like I would rather be on my white side, because being white I can get away with more shit, you know what I mean?

Being white I'm a majority, being Native I'm a minority. So being myself I would conflict myself like that. But expressing myself to others, I was neutral. Always neutral.

Um, well, how could I say this. How could I put this actually. For me, like I said, for me, I believe that I am Native, but white on the outside, because that's the way I see myself. But as in the form of belonging, I can't really say either side. Because I'm both sides. I could say I'm grey, instead of black, instead of white, I mixed them both together to be where I belong. I have no problems living on my reserve, I love to live on my reserve, but I love to live in the city, more people to socialize with. It doesn't matter, I don't see myself belonging to either side, I see myself belonging to society. Does that make sense?

I try to blend in, like a chameleon. Just for myself to fit in. But if others, like if I go hang around with my white friends and they know I'm Native and they accept it, then I'm going to be Native with them. You know, I'm going to use, like for instance I don't talk Native, but I got that, even Natives say I got that Cree accent. And I don't speak Cree. So, that's what I try, I just try to blend in where I am at the moment.

But going to Gillam School, for the high school years. I did notice that we were a lesser group because, its just what I thought. Like for an instance when you get to high school, you're allowed to pick different subjects to get into college and stuff. When I was in the high school, they gave me subjects that I couldn't choose. And then a lot of times I noticed these were just the basic subjects, like Math G, LA, Language Arts General. Or instead of saying I want Math S because I want to do this. I found I didn't have that option, they just gave me what they wanted because maybe that, then on the other hand I thought maybe that's all the band could afford. But then I realized the Band gave the school enough money to go through high school, to get what you want done. But I didn't see it that way. I didn't see it that way on my half, because I know, like I said I quit school in grade 11, and all my subjects were general. Yet I would sit in class with Turnbull, teaching, helping him teach his students Science S, specialized science. And he would ask me why are you in the general class, that's just where I was put. And then he would be like, but you have way more potential than that. Same with LA, and then I would be like, she would be like why are you in my class, shouldn't you be in a better class, because you have the skills to do specialized language arts. So I'd be like I don't know, and it would lead back to the same thing, this is where I was put, this is the class I was told to go to. Same with Math. I was stuck

in Mr. Wood's general math for consumers, when I knew I wanted to be higher than that in Math S.

It's like you can simply say, who are you, or you can say who are you, where are you from, you see the more you put into a question, the more definitive it can be. Instead of just saying who are you, Oh I'm Shawn, and that's it. But if you say who are you, where are you from, how old are you, then you just get a bigger, better picture. So me, I guess, it's just the same I guess. I am who I am. I know I'm both sides, I accept both sides, even though I do sometimes conflict within myself, who I try to be. Even though I try to stay as neutral as possible. But I do use both sides to try and get to my advantages that I see. And I also use both sides to, I also use both sides to remove disadvantages. For me, I noticed, I seen this too growing up. Sometimes I see my Native friends, they're like oh I'm not going to date her, she's white. I don't date white people. Or I'm not going to date him, because he's Native. I see that too, I even see Native saying that themselves. Oh I'm Native, I'm not going to date Native, because they might be my cousin (laughs). You know what I mean? I never see that on a white guy, a white person saying they don't want to date another white person... But all in all, but like I said, I do, because of the way society is, I do find conflict sometimes. But I always try to iron that out, to try and say, well let them think what they think about me, I know myself who I am. I'm a mixed blood, and I'm okay with that, because I am a human, and that's what matters.

Cause like I said for me growing up, I accepted myself for who I am, even though both sides, they conflict with each other. you know people telling me, you're living here, and be who you are. I'm trying to be who I am, so what if I look white. Growing up being as a Native, that's who I am. But I'm also white, because it's in my genetics. So you just gotta balance it out. But like I said on my side, I try to use both to get my ways, to benefit myself, but I guess that's still kind of wrong, because you could say that's cheating.

Reflection

When I reflect on the conversation I had with Shawn, I can see that the use of humour in uncomfortable situations, when addressing painful or hurtful experiences is both a method of coping and of healing. His experiences of being mistaken, or not easily identifiable as Cree is something I also share. I reflected on one of the many experiences where judgments are made in a journal entry:

I am First Nation – a quizzical look across the table, classroom, desk, telephone line (because I certainly do not sound First Nation either) – My Dad is Cree and my mom is Scandinavian – I look exactly like my mom. Emphasis on exactly. oh....

always is the response – shaking the head in a knowing way – you mean not the real First Nation – oh.... they say – like Métis.... Um no not like Métis. But that is another story from another classroom. (Rowe, August 2011)

This is also an experience that all of the three other participants have expressed. Not being recognized can be hurtful in the progressions and developments of our identity. This is also impacted when external sources continue to try to understand your identity in a way that makes sense to their socializations. For example labeling a mixed-blood Cree person as Métis. It can seem like we are not only fighting our own internalizations, but also those of other people. The combination of both can cause further damage.

Connecting common experiences

The third section will present stories of common experiences. While each individual's story is unique, they also hold commonalities across experiences. Through intersecting of individual's experiences we can create a relational space to move towards collective healing, decolonization, and resurgence. The section on common experiences will weave together a picture of commonality to highlight where there exists connection and kinship as mixed-blood Cree individuals who work towards reconnecting, re-engaging, and re-memembering who we are at our essence. Within these common experiences I also will work to share the connections between the stories shared by the Cree Elders and what the participants are shared. Common experiences highlighted in the following section are: impact of colonization on identity, complexity of identity, influential relationships, and wellbeing.

Impact of colonization on identity

When the Cree Elders shared their stories they expressed the impact of varying institutions and events upon the development of their identity. Colonization as a structure

has been implicated in the lives of many generations of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Don shared the intergenerational impact of the Indian Residential School system upon his sense of self and wellbeing.

And how because of colonization, I never experienced that life, that good life. I experienced a different kind of life. And so then I started to understand my, the reason why my father was the way he was. He was affected by residential school in our community. My family, my community was affected by residential school. And some of those teachings of punitive discipline, he got when he was there. That's the only way he knew how to parent, and so he parented me like that, you know abusive. (Don, pp. 3-4 lines 67-73)

Belinda spoke about Indian Residential Schools and the intergenerational trauma.

As a child you don't know what that is. As a child all you know is that it feels ugly. So as a child we start to feel ugly. And then it kind of stays with us. And then we go to residential school and then it gets worse. Some truly worse than others, others not so bad. Depending on who was your favourite, whose favourite you were. I was never anybody's favourite, because I was too loud, I was a trouble maker. But anyway, ya, so there you are, you are growing up with people that are not your family. Then you gotta go to church everyday, everyday, and twice on Sundays. And you hear the word sinner a lot. I don't go to church, you couldn't pay me to go to church today. (Belinda, p. 8, lines 174-182)

Belinda shared a part of her healing journey was connecting to others who have experienced similar things.

2001 to 2004 I had residential school healing gatherings at the Forks I just did them, I didn't ask anybody. I know what it did to me and my family, and I said I cannot be the only one thinking like this or feeling like this. (Belinda, p.27, lines 609-611)

Don also shared how he has used his experiences to support the wellbeing of others through his counseling.

That means think deeply about your life. That means think about your values. That means, part of when I do counseling, I get people to think about their life. To think about how they got to where they are today. Say they are struggling with depression, low self-esteem, struggling with addictions, struggling in a bad relationship. Get them to think about how they got to be there. From their past. So they have to deconstruct that whole past and make a new life. They have to make a new life. They have to reclaim their consciousness... People have to be aware of

their power. They have power. And emotional, mental power, physical power and spiritual power. (Don, p. 5, lines 96-108)

Participants shared through their stories the varying ways that colonization has and continues to impact the development of their identity. Impacts discussed include varying levels of awareness about history, internal colonization, disconnection and separation, and racism and stereotypes.

Awareness about history. Kelsey shared that until she was an adult she did not possess a depth of knowledge about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada due to several factors including the lack of inclusion in the education system, segregation of urban Indigenous peoples in the city and a lack of awareness in her own family.

I feel so silly not really understanding these things, but... when do you really learn about this, when do you really learn about Aboriginal history? When do you learn about residential schools, I mean its kind of coming out more now... And I think that's just really unfortunate you know, because we're all kind of kept in this bubble and fed this information... Aboriginal people are used as kind of the scapegoat and it's just really, really frustrating now to think about it. But I can't be really angry at myself from that early point. Like before the summer and growing up, and having these thoughts about, like this internal racism towards myself and this racism towards Aboriginal people... Because it's like, that's what I was taking in, that's what I was taught. You always heard about people being drunk, or don't trust them, or panhandling. They're so different, they're scary, They're not to be trusted. All these different ideas, they are just fed into you and it's just very frustrating to me... After that summer I want to go into history and that's what I want to explore and I want to explore specifically Aboriginal history, and that was a big piece. It was really good to explore that and understand that more. Because you know, I've taken other history classes, and you don't learn about these people who were here before these other people you know. (Kelsey, p. 23 lines 506-526)

Actually people who went to the schools (Indian Residential Schools) and hearing what they had to say, I'm like oh my goodness. Ah ha! This is really normal. No one talks about this. So ya that was a big thing for my mom too, because mom's like okay... ya I do have a status card, I was like, "what, you have a status card?", and she pulled it out and it says (Mom's name) is a Registered Indian. I was like Registered Indian, like how archaic is that. Like you have to have an ID card. You know identifying what ethnicity, what kind of person you are. (Kelsey, p.25, lines 566-571)

Drake shared the ways that he is connected to the history of his community and how the values that were taught have been disconnected.

And, but then I listen to some of the history that he gives me, based on community, how our people used to be. You know just because there wasn't Chief and Council doesn't mean that they didn't control everything. Because he said the leaders in our community were the people that were needed at any given time. You know, the hunters when hunting was needed the hunters became the leaders. When they were done hunting it was the women who came forth, they were the ones who took care of everybody, the children and the hunters, you know. Everyone. Then when there was a big decision to be made in the community, it was the community who came forth, it was the Council who made the decision based on all the information given to them. So everybody had a role. That's what I'd like to see again, right. (Drake, p. 36-37, lines 836-845)

Drake spoke about the way that historical events have impacted the people in his family, and how they relate to each other. He also shared his struggle in finding connection and support for his well-being as a result of the trauma within his family circle.

I didn't get it in my family life. And this is my opinion, because of the stuff they went through, because of the struggles, you know. Those values were ripped away from them, so they forgot how to love, to be supporting to be compassionate, understanding, you know. And I think that's what everybody needs in life, is they need that support, they need that encouragement, they need, and it's unfortunate that I had to go out of my own family circle to get that. But because of the values from my own Aboriginal side, I probably wouldn't of known that. (Drake, p. 53, lines 1194-1200)

Don shared the impact of colonization upon his sense of identity, specifically the intergenerational impact of the Indian Residential school system and how his awareness and healing from this influenced the wellbeing and connection of his children.

And I started to find Elders that were talking about this journey of life, and what is supposed to happen when you are born, when you are a child, when you are an adolescent, when you become an adult, and when you become an Elder. That's the journey of life I started learning about. And how because of colonization, I never experienced that life, that good life. I experienced a different kind of life. And so then I started to understand, the reason why my father was the way he was. He was affected by residential school in our community. My family, my community was affected by residential school. And some of those teachings of

punitive discipline, he got when he was there. That's the only way he knew how to parent, and so he parented me like that, you know abusive. And so I started unlearning, unlearning what I learned. All the negative teachings about life, and I started to learn about the good teachings about life. And then I became a father myself. So I wanted to teach my children good things, to be proud of who you are. So I started teaching them that. And also being in this world. I took them to the sweat lodge, I took them to the Sundance. And after they became teenagers, then they had a choice. And they could choose to follow that. Then they choose. And they also had a choice of following the mainstream education way. So they learned. They both learned at university. They are both in university. And maybe some day they will go to Sundance. My daughter's thinking about it already. It's all part of consciousness. (Don, pp. 3-4, lines 64-82)

Internal colonization. Participants expressed the ways that they internalized the colonization process. This is shared through the ways they experience stereotypes and expectations from society and whether they are internalized within their own sense of identity.

Kelsey shared her frustration about the way that she internalized negative beliefs about Aboriginal peoples due to her lack of exposure to positive images.

I was definitely angry at certain points, angry that I didn't know this stuff. Angry that I wasn't aware. Angry at myself for even having those kind of thoughts about myself, or about Aboriginal people. (Kelsey, p. 24, lines 541-543)

In gaining new awareness and conversations within her family about her Cree ancestry, Kelsey spoke about how she has become aware of the impact of greater society on her disconnection with that aspect of herself.

I mean I am rediscovering this part of me, and looking at what my family's life has been and I think. I've even joked with my aunt. You know this sounds so bad, but sometimes I feel like I am totally assimilated, you know like they (Government of Canada) did their job. (Kelsey, p. 43, lines 980-983)

Mary Ann found that at times she feels more comfortable in verbalizing her Cree identity to people who are white. This connects to an insecurity about being light skinned and not being identifiable to outsiders as Cree.

Even I think it's like, when I'm talking to other obviously Indigenous people, I'm talking to them you know I haven't ever really had a bad reaction, but I'm always waiting for that one to happen you know, but it's usually not at all I feel more comfortable telling people that seem white about it (her identity). (Mary Ann, p. 42, lines 952-955)

She feels like she may be judged as not belonging, or trying to assume an identity that she has no right in expressing.

Drake felt like he does not fit in anywhere, the impact of being excluded from his community due to his mixed-blood ancestry affects his sense of wellbeing and mental health.

It makes life hard. You know one part of me tells me I am better than that, I can do anything. I've proven that many times in my life, and then all that negative stuff comes to me, and it just discourages me and I get depressed and I feel like I can't do anything. (Drake, p. 10, lines 208-211)

Belinda spoke about her building awareness about her internalized colonization. She was able to speak up when she saw acts of racism against other Aboriginal peoples, but she still felt shame about who she was as a Cree woman.

If anyone was saying anything to them, you know I was right there to say something. You know. And yet I couldn't like how I was feeling about being Aboriginal. I couldn't figure out what it is that I didn't like, you know? (Belinda, p. 13, lines 279-281)

When working to undo the impact of internal colonization Don suggested that we need to be aware of connections that exist within ourselves and between ourselves and all our relations.

So we think, we feel. We feel, we think. Whenever we have any stress, we carry it on our body somewhere. We carry it in our body. So that's what consciousness is. Consciousness is becoming aware of the whole human being, becoming aware of our self. And becoming aware of all of your relatives. (Don, p.6, lines 129-133)

Disconnection and separation. Colonization disconnects people from their true selves. Internalization of colonization leads to insecurity of knowing who you are and where you belong.

Wilfred suggested that a search into identity begins with looking at ourselves and how we have become disconnected.

I guess for everybody this is a different path you follow that links to your personal experiences, growing up, what happened to you, how you feel you become disconnected, and what it is you are looking for. When people talk about identity, identity it's a very broad concept. But for people who want to grow it's Ne-na, it's me, that's where you have to start. Like your grandfather said, you have to remember. So the first thing you do is you have to remember. And from that base it's built. So the memories of what we have, of what happened to us when we were young, the things, like when I remember right away, I remember my grandparents, and some of the things that they taught me and how they made me feel. And they're the ones that brought me back. (Wilfred, p. 1, lines 4-13)

Mary Ann and Kelsey both shared experiences of questioning and trying to make sense of who they are.

It's hard, like I feel like, that's its just like falling through the cracks of identity, and like just trying to grapple with it... Not having the right to do something, and feeling like that. Cause my verbal ... it's only my words or my knowledge of my own history that makes me legitimate and sometimes I don't want to say anything. (Mary Ann, pp. 14-25, lines 317-566)

Because of all the history with the government when women left the reserve, or when they married a white guy, they lost their status. And my Grandma did lose her status... it makes me even angry now... that's so confusing to an identity... you're cut off all of a sudden, that you are not belonging to your community. And what right does the government have to do that? (Kelsey, p. 27, lines 600-605)

So I think that's also a huge piece, this whole piece of colonization, this whole piece of government identifying who's what and who isn't. You know that obviously played out in my life, obviously played out in my whole family's life, you know, because there's a cut off after my mom, it's like no one else is Aboriginal, and you just fit in there, you know my mom. But even legislation now that just changed, recognizing the differences in gender relations... Honestly I know we probably should try to do this, but it's almost like, I don't know if I really care if the government defines me for who I am, because I know who I am. (Kelsey, pp.27-29, lines 609-648)

Disconnection and separation have led to the lack of transmission of the Cree language across generations. This is significant as the transmission of stories and teachings are both important vessels through which to the continuity of Cree identity had been passed within Cree language. Belinda shared:

So, apart from knowing that I was Aboriginal, and that I'm from the Cree Nation I really didn't know anymore than that. And in the time I was in residential school, I lost my language. (Belinda, p.12, lines 266-268)

Don, too, indicated that language was a struggle in his experience in schools, but he managed to retain his Cree language.

So I had that experience of being affected by the school system. And then my identity was altered then. I began to, I guess feel like my language was not very useful in this new society, in this new world that I entered. So then I didn't speak Cree as much. I started speaking English all the time. But it's still in my brain, the language is still in my brain. So I never lost that language, I never lost it. (Don, p. 2, lines 41-45)

Wilfred shared a story about a school in Saskatchewan where youth were able to connect with spirituality, teachings, and language.

And the reason they come here is to learn about their spirituality. They come to learn about who they are. They come to learn about what the drum means, what the pipe means, what the sweats mean. And the sad thing, they even come to learn their language. Because the sad thing is, on the reserve they can't learn that. (Wilfred, p. 18, lines 390-393)

Language is an important mechanism to allow people to connect with and reclaim their identity. Drake shares his wish for reconnecting and learning Cree.

We were talking about, like being Cree and white. Like now, I grew up in white society. I'm lucky enough to hang on to my Aboriginal background, although I can't speak my language. I can barely understand what people are saying, unless they're swearing at me. (laughs) But I still hold it, you know. I want my daughters to learn it. (Drake, p. 21, lines 467-470)

Kelsey shares her grandmother's experience with Cree, her knowledge of the language being severed through her residential school experience. However when Kelsey traveled to Peepeekisis her grandmother began remembering Cree words, making Kelsey believe that there is an important connection to land with language.

But because we kind of didn't know about this, or didn't really think about our identity, ugh, no one in my family, you know my Grandma, she's lost most of her language. Although oddly enough, when we go to our home community, we'll be driving and we'll be getting closer and closer and all of a sudden she will be saying these Cree words... it's weird because I know my Grandma here, but when I travel with her its like, to reserve and family there, I don't know if it's freeing for her, if there's some sort of connection that happens for her there. (Kelsey, p. 44, lines 994-1008)

Lateral violence and exclusion are also two key impacts of colonization. Drake explained how he has been affected by these experiences with his own community and how this has felt.

But then the people who have been there (in Fox Lake Cree Nation), will never see you as part of that, right. You are always an outsider. If you are not full (Cree), you are always an outsider. (Drake, p. 30, lines 676-677)

There was a lot of racism there (Town of Gillam, traditional territory of Fox Lake Cree Nation), a lot of prejudice. We were segregated there, even in schools. If you weren't Native you couldn't hang out here. If you weren't white you couldn't hang out here... And then as I grew up though, I started to be able to differentiate my background. And people started to accept me on both sides. But then when I was on the Native side people would be like "oh you're a white man, you know". My own people. Same thing when I was over there, they would be like, "oh you have Indian". "We like you but..." And I remember one time in high school, this one person, we would all go over to their place, and none of them were Aboriginal. And then one guy spoke up, this loud joke. And he was like "you're turning into a white man, you're turning into a white man". I was like wow. I never did feel like I fit in either side, right. But then I still lean more towards my Aboriginal side. My mother took care of me, she was full Cree. So she took care of me her whole life. My whole life, the majority of my whole life. So that's where I lean towards. So somebody asks me, what's your background. Oh, I'm Aboriginal. Oh you look like you're something else. Okay, well, I'm half Aboriginal, I'm half Caucasian. (Drake, p. 5-6, lines 103-119)

Even now, like I still don't fit anymore. Especially after my last experience with home. After all that stuff that went on with my wife and I. There was a comment made about me on Facebook, by one of our members. It said, "oh his white ass, he's not even Indian and he thinks he knows what to do for our people". (Drake, p.7, lines 139-142)

The hardest part of that too is, me, my family, my family line is Fox Lake. Right from the beginning my family line is Fox Lake, they come right from the York Factory Band. And then we have all these other people who came in who weren't part of the band. First of all they weren't part of Fox Lake, they came in, got voted in for whatever reason. And then you have a whole bunch of them, their family lines come from Fort Severn, right. And they're not even original people. Yet they're the ones holding power over us, and telling us we don't fit. And it's disgusting, that's what it is. Like your father always talked to me about my great grandfather. Telling me stories about him, how big of a person he was in our community. I tried following in those footsteps. Trying to be that person, and still can't get accepted. (Drake, p.8, lines 167-179)

Feeling disconnected from a community that is meant to be a haven of belonging can cause repercussions to an individual. Belonging is a basic and foundational human need. Drake shared how he felt like he was not a part of anywhere, that there did not exist a system of support and membership.

And it's very discouraging, and now I don't even want to go home, at all. I don't even want to go back to my home, my own home. I don't feel welcome there. (Drake, p. 9, lines 183-184)

It was that one comment that brought a lot, you know calling me white. And I don't feel like I fit anywhere anymore. You know it's hard. Sit in a room with a bunch of white people, non-Aboriginal, you know and I look like a piece of pepper. Sit in a room with a bunch of Aboriginal people and I look like a piece of salt. I can't win either way. (Drake, p. 9, lines 194-199)

And it's not that either side is fighting to keep me. It's like both sides are fighting to keep me away. And it's discouraging. (Drake, p. 9, lines 203-204)

It makes life hard. You know one part of me tells me I am better than that, I can do anything. I've proven that many times in my life, and then all that negative stuff comes to me, and it just discourages me and I get depressed and I feel like I can't do anything. (Drake, p. 10, lines 208-211)

Shawn shared the questioning that has come with his experience of mixed-blood identity, and the disconnection that occurs between both “sides” of self.

I do know that, it's hard to explain what I'm thinking right now. But it's like I always found myself in the middle between the two groups. Even though I was accepted by both sides. But myself I found, like, who do I belong to? You know what I'm saying? Do I belong with them, because I lived with them all my life, or do I belong with these guys because I look like them? Do you know what I'm saying? So I used to think, even at that young age, I was already into science, even thinking about already what at that age that little brain should not be thinking about. So I used to think, I used to think, what if like somehow I could duplicate myself. That would be so great, because then I could hang out, because some of these people in each group did not like each other. Do you know what I'm saying? (Shawn, pp.6-7, lines 184-194)

Wilfred indicated that it is important to uncover connections that exist, within our family, within ourselves and within a physical space. Each of these is connected to spirit.

It starts with remembering your grandparents, remembering who your family are, if you have that opportunity to remember. The place, the physical place is not that important. It's your space in pimatsiwin, your space in life, and that connection you have to it. So the space can be anywhere, the physical surroundings can be anywhere. Just as long as you have that connection with that spirit. Because Atchak is everything, the spirit is everything. It's the starting, it's the ending, it doesn't matter where. Because it's everywhere. That's the connection. And once you get that, because everybody has that, it's just that a lot of the times we haven't worked at it, to make it strong. And once you get it strong, then the other spirits will know, and they'll be put in front of you to help guide you along in what you're supposed to be doing. Because we all have something to do in our lives. That's the job we have, we have to find out what that is, and we have to do it. (Wilfred, p. 7-8, lines 154-165)

Racism and stereotypes. Experiences and impacts of racism and stereotypes upon identity and wellbeing were touched on in all conversations. Drake shared some of his first experiences with racism and what this felt like as a child.

The first time it was brought to my attention... I was actually back in Fox Lake. It must have been in grade 2... somebody called me a dirty Indian. And I didn't know what it was... I was a kid, so I just said they are teasing me, they are teasing me, calling me dirty. And it's really hard to say when I first knew what my backgrounds were. It was maybe late adolescence... Maybe grade 4 or 5. That's when I started to realize who I was. I knew I lived on a reserve and I was Native.

And at that point that's all I thought I was. I didn't know I was part white. I knew who my father was, because my mother talked about him. I knew what he looked like, but still then, skin colour didn't mean nothing to me. So I grew up, I grew up Native. Back then before it was taboo to say it, I was an Indian. People would ask me and I would say I'm an Indian. (Drake, p.4, lines 63-80)

Kelsey shared how she was uncomfortable as a child disclosing her Aboriginal ancestry, and introduced the idea of safe spaces to disclose identity when you are not immediately identifiable, or can pass as white.

I don't know, specifically, if I ever told anybody when I was a kid that I was Aboriginal, and if I did, then it wasn't this big significant thing. But I remember not being crazy about disclosing that, like I didn't really want to share that a lot. So those are kind of like the not safe spaces. (Kelsey, p. 56, lines 1266-1269)

Mary Ann shared an experience where she felt uncomfortable about being centered out to teach fellow classmates a traditional dance for the production of a video.

(L)ike when I was like 11 or 12. We were doing this filming project and it was about, like, there's one lady teaching kids how to do like tanning and stuff. And then, like oh Mary Ann can teach you like how to Powwow, and so there's a scene of me, and I didn't have any of my ceremonial gear, so it's like me with a blanket, trying to teach these people how to crow hop. So it's like these little girls and it was like the most, like looking at the video it was like so ridiculous... trying to teach these people how to crow hop, it was weird looking back. I remember watching the video and like I couldn't theorize about it as much as I can now, but I remember being like oh my god, like this is awful. (Mary Ann, p. 2, lines 38-46)

As a young adult she also experienced discomfort, as classmates discussed stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples. She felt that because she was not clearly identifiable as Cree that this impacted her experience in that situation.

I kinda do remember being embarrassed in high school socials classes. You know when I dyed my hair a lot and so it's like green or whatever, and so I always like felt uncomfortable. You know like if I'm not in my gear, or don't have my black hair, like I don't look like, you know. And so when we did you know anthropology studies, or when we just started it in socials class, people in class were like, what do you think about Native people, and everyone's talking about stereotypes... I remember just feeling like so, like just getting super hot and flushed and embarrassed. And not wanting to be like, and not having the claim to

be like, hey you know that's kind of horrible because I identify like that. But just be like shrinking in my seat and feeling so, like so awful about it. (Mary Ann, pp. 6-7, lines 68-77)

Drake shared two separate occasions occurring years apart where he chose to attend counselling. In both instances he felt he was judged due to his identity.

I seen a non-Aboriginal counselor, she's white. First thing she told me is oh, you got problems, you're crazy. I looked at her and said you're not even supposed to use that word. I said what kind of a person are you, you are supposed to be helping me get my head on track, and you're telling me this and that, and that I probably can't amount to nothing. (Drake, p.11, lines 238-242)

So much was happening in my life then, I was traveling all over the place, and doing this and doing that. And I couldn't talk to people in our own community because they like to blab. And some of them even made accusations. Like I was going to go talk to this one woman who used to come to our community. And everyone kept saying she's good, she's really good to talk to. And it was during my depression. I didn't do drugs, and I didn't even drink. But you know I was malnourished, I was under weight, and my skin was pasty white. And I walked in there and the first thing she said, before I even get to introduce myself. She said "how long have you been doing drugs?" I said "excuse me?" She said "how long have you been doing drugs?" I said "I don't do drugs". She said "you don't have to lie to me". I said "what reason do I have to lie to you, I said I don't do drugs". She goes "when you're ready to be honest with yourself come back and talk with me". I was so angry. (Drake, p.12, lines 261-272)

Kelsey shared an experience at a bus stop in Winnipeg where she was approached and given advice to watch out for an Aboriginal man in the vicinity.

And the crazy thing is, I guess because some people look at me and maybe don't know that I am Aboriginal, they think it's okay to say things that are negative. And that bothers me, like would they say that to me if they blatantly knew I was Aboriginal. And so I am always like what's that about? You know? So I'm, different situations like at the bus stop. One example I can think of is that this woman said to me, because there was this Aboriginal man and he was asking for change, and she was like oh don't bother with those people. She went up to me and said oh don't bother with them, they are just going to spend it on drugs. (Kelsey, p. 52, lines 1183-1191)

Shawn found that his experience in high school was framed by institutional racism, and that he was placed in certain classes due to pre-judgment and assumptions about intellect rather than actuality.

Going to Gillam School, for the high school years. I did notice that we were a lesser group because, it's just what I thought. Like for an instance when you get to high school, you're allowed to pick different subjects to get into college and stuff. When I was in the high school, they gave me subjects that I couldn't choose. And then a lot of times I noticed these were just the basic subjects, like Math G, Language Arts General. Or instead of saying I want Math S because I want to do this. I found I didn't have that option, they just gave me what they wanted because maybe that, then on the other hand I thought maybe that's all the Band could afford. But then I realized the Band gave the school enough money to go through high school, to get what you want done. But I didn't see it that way. I didn't see it that way on my half, because I know, like I said I quit school in grade 11, and all my subjects were general. Yet I would sit in class with (teacher), teaching, helping him teach his students Science S, Specialized Science. And he would ask me "why are you in the general class?", that's just where I was put. And then he would be like, "but you have way more potential than that". Same with LA, and then I would be like, she would be like why are you in my class, shouldn't you be in a better class, because you have the skills to do specialized Language Arts. So I'd be like I don't know, and it would lead back to the same thing, this is where I was put, this is the class I was told to go to. Same with math. I was stuck in General Math for Consumers, when I knew I wanted to be higher than that in Math S. (Shawn, pp. 21-22, lines 649-669)

Belinda shared her experience with racism as a young child when going into a store in town with her Granny and how it felt uncomfortable, but at the time she did not know why.

But you don't know why. So you grow up with that, wondering, well why did I feel like that, I didn't steal anything. And my grandparents are the most honest people you'd ever meet in your life. You know so that kind of stays with you, but you can't ever figure it out. You know you can't say, oh I know why they did that to me, it's because I'm Indian. (Belinda, p.8, lines 166-170)

Kelsey shared how her awareness and understanding of colonization and history moved her to be more vocal about racism and stereotypes.

So you know it's just so frustrating because you want people to understand and get where you are. And see what you're seeing. And you can't force people. And

I'm trying to understand that myself, I need to pick when I say something and I need to be comfortable, I have to find the strength to speak up more. It is important to speak up, it is important to say things, but it's like some people, you don't. (Kelsey, p. 32, lines 721-726)

Personally there's definitely been some conversations with family members, and I don't know if I want to identify them, because I love them and I don't think they are coming from a place of. I don't think they are trying to hurt me, I don't think they are trying to be like that. But just like comments like oh I get to check the box, or my kids will get to check the box. I think it's also when it comes from your loved ones, it's just more painful. But I think it also makes me feel stronger to say something, because I'm like you know what, I am not, not going to say something. (Kelsey, pp. 53-54, lines 1205-1227)

You know they don't understand what's going on and that's just part of the process of, you're identifying and you want to speak out, you know you're angry, and you want to say you know this isn't right. (Kelsey, p. 57, lines 1303-1305)

Complexity of identity

Each participant shared stories related to the complexity in coming to understand their identity. The following section will highlight participants' experiences with the following: awareness of possessing multiple ancestries, how they express an answer to the question "who am I?", external visual identifiers, external judgments, and confidence in self identity.

Awareness about possessing multiple ancestries. Drake shared that when he was a young adult he began to search for his father, wanting to find connection and belonging. This was precipitated by knowing that he was not one hundred percent Cree and a desire to connect with his father and his paternal heritage. Even through this searching however, he felt more connected to his Cree community.

I never went back to the city again until I was 18. I came out for school. And that's when I had my identity crisis. So I had my identity crisis, I didn't know where I belonged in the world... I started travelling. That's when I started going from city to city, where do I belong, where do I belong. But like I said, it's like a magnet. It kept drawing me back, drawing me back. It didn't matter where, I even went to the States. And I came back home. Because I knew that it's where I

belonged, when life gets hard, that's where my family. That's where my family is. We're supposed to be there to care. (Drake, p.31-32, lines 701-711)

When I asked Drake if his experience of not knowing his father had impacted his understanding of identity, he shared:

I don't know if that was an influence. All I know is that to me family is everything. Family means a lot to me. And I want, I'd like to know my other side. even if my father doesn't want nothing to do with me, I don't care. At least he knows of me. But for the most part I'd like to know who my other brother is. You know I'd like to get to know him. It won't be the best relationship. You know of me, I know of you, and maybe we can be come friends, or, at least be acquaintances of some sort. (Drake, p.25, lines 560-565)

Drake also expressed a wondering about whether his life would have been on a different trajectory if he was raised outside of his Cree community:

She (his mother) gave up on forcing me to go to school and all that. And I wonder if it would have been any different if I wasn't Aboriginal, or even if I was raised on my father's side. And I question it. A lot. I question where I would have been if I was raised somewhere different. (Drake, p.44, lines 992-995)

Participants explored how they made sense of self and the complexity in their search for the words to express identity.

Kelsey shared her difficulty in her identity journey and how she questioned the concept of blood quotient in this search.

I mean my father is British ancestry and some Scottish, you know. And he didn't really understand what I was going through either. And I don't know... I never really thought of myself as Aboriginal, because I thought, oh I'm so watered down. You know you think about blood quotients and you think of that. It's just so ridiculous. I'm not really Aboriginal, because people have been with other ethnicities and whatever, so what is there really left in me, you know? (Kelsey, p. 27, lines 580-586)

She also felt that there were multiple layers of complexity when she began to explore her Aboriginal ancestry.

And you know it's so confusing, you know even the whole idea of acknowledging all of these other pieces of our identity, it's the same thing if you think about last

names, you know where have our mothers gone, you know and that's where my Aboriginal ancestry came from is my maternal side. Although when you were talking about your Grandma, and not knowing her ancestry, I know on my mom's father's side, there's Aboriginal ancestry I learned, but they didn't acknowledge it, because they were really, really against acknowledging that. (Kelsey, p.79, lines 1795-1802)

Shawn found that his multiple ancestries have provided him the ability to feel comfortable in varying environments.

For me, like I said, for me, I believe that I am Native, but white on the outside, because that's the way I see myself. But as in the form of belonging, I can't really say either side. Because I'm both sides. I could say I'm grey, instead of black, instead of white, I mixed them both together to be where I belong. I have no problems living on my reserve, I love to live on my reserve, but I love to live in the city, more people to socialize with. It doesn't matter, I don't see myself belonging to either side, I see myself belonging to society. Does that make sense? (Shawn, pp. 19-20, lines 583-589)

Drake found that it has become an important search for him to find his father, a man who contributed to his birth, but a man he does not know, other than in a couple of pictures.

I mean he is my blood (Father) And I've searched everywhere. I've went into forums, looking for my family. Because my last name is kind of popular in the French area. Well my dad's last name is kind of popular in the French area, but, even my lineage. I went back to see what kind of names are related to us. (Drake, p. 25, lines 547-550)

If I ever get the chance to meet my father, or at least my brother. I don't think my life will ever be whole, complete. Because that's a part of me that's missing, that I know is somewhere missing. Maybe that will, maybe if I do meet them, you know it will give me that sense of belonging on that part of me. Whether they accept me or not, at least I made that attempt, you know. It will be something that, a door I can close if I have to get my closure on it. Cause I know that I come from somewhere else as well, and I'm not complete until I figure that out, or maybe I never will be. Maybe at some point I'll just accept that it is what it is. But at this point in my life I need that closure, and I don't have it. And I won't for a long time. Because I know they're alive. (Drake, p. 60, lines 1349-1358)

In speaking about the title of my project, which includes the use of the term mixed-blood, I had shared the difficulty I experienced in finding words to describe an experience, and how this struggle for me continues today with the use of the term being something I

settled for, rather than felt truly incorporated an experience. Kelsey shared her struggle with this as well.

I know when I looked at the title, honestly Gladys I don't know how to offer you a different title. But I was confused because I was like, like I don't know if that's really how I think of myself. Although going through this experience and trying to understand my identity and trying to understand... sometimes I feel like okay I don't want to completely ignore my other side, because I do love my family members who aren't Aboriginal and so I don't want to completely disregard that is part of my identity and my character development. And so it's a struggle because it's like in one way I want to empower myself, I want to acknowledge this. I need to I think. I need to say this is who I am, but in doing that am I also saying this is what I am not. (Kelsey, p.75, lines 1705-1714)

Belinda shared her multiple ancestries, and her awareness of who she is in relation to the world around her.

So anyway coming from that, so, first of all, in my life I'm born at home by a midwife, so I'm born into my culture. I'm born into who I'm supposed to be as an Aboriginal person. You know there's some Scottish there, and some German. Because my dad was German, and my mom, my mom, so her dad was German and my granny was Cree but also Scottish. See. But there's no part of that in our life. There isn't any bagpipes, there isn't any haggus or whatever. That's not anything we know anything about. So we don't associate with that. That's part of who we are, but not what we associate with. So I grew up, I was, I was brought up with my grandparents. (Belinda, p. 3, lines 46-54)

Don shared that it is important for people to connect with their whole being.

And part of that too is honouring your Cree heritage, and your other heritage. It's honouring both. Because that's how the Creator made it. That's how he made it. (Don, p. 11, lines 228-229)

Expression of “Who am I”. The ability of participants to verbalize their experience through a discrete identifier, for example with the term “mixed-blood”, varied and encompassed the use of numerous terms. Participants recognized that how they felt across time and in different contexts impacted the way that they expressed an answer to “who am I”.

Mary Ann shared a story where she felt she looked more like her inner self when she was darker in the summer-times and that this visual identifier was important to her. But it also allowed her to reflect on her privilege in relation to other members of her own community of origin.

Well I remember, you know like even still it's something I really feel uncomfortable with, you know I really like it the best in the summer, cause I turn brown instantly and I feel more like the inner me, but like it's weird, to know, or to just feel guilty about, like not having these same sort of identifiers, like you feel like a certain person inside and like, you have these identifiers, like you pass for white or in realizing like I'm not going to have the same hard, or same sort of time as people back in Gillam, or people that, or you know because I look a certain way, you know, I grew up outside of this context, I have a different sort of standard of life, that I have been able to have. And that's made me feel, like, it's sort of like a source of angst, right. Like, I am extremely grateful, but at the same time I'm, you know, you know I wanna be more, its not like I wanna have a grittier life, but it's something that I kind of grapple with. (Mary Ann, p. 5, lines 93-104)

I asked if this is something that she continued to struggle with and she responded:

Ya totally, just, and it's always awkward, you know, I take lots of Indigenous studies classes and, um, gender and women's studies classes. And you know talking about all that sort of stuff, talking, and you don't want to play like the, oh I'm more disenfranchised card, right, and it's kind of awkward. Like I'd rather it's something that I would just, I wish people could just look at me and know, just by osmosis, rather than just always having to verbalize it. It seems like extremely awkward to me. It's weird. (Mary Ann, p. 5, lines 108-114)

Shawn found that the way he expressed his identity varied across contexts, where he felt more like a chameleon and able to blend in dependent upon the environment.

I try to blend in, like a chameleon. Just for myself to fit in. But if others, like if I go hang around with my white friends and they know I'm Native and they accept it, then I'm going to be Native with them. You know, I'm going to use, like for instance I don't talk Native, but I got that, even Natives say I got that Cree accent. And I don't speak Cree. So, that's what I try, I just try to blend in where I am at the moment. (Shawn, p. 21, lines 637-641)

Drake found that while his Cree ancestry was the largest influence on his identity, he also felt that it was important to connect with and understand who we is in totality.

And I think too, when you are trying to identify with, you got people who want to identify with both sides, and then there's people who want to identify with one side of themselves. And then there's someone like me who struggles with it. I want to belong to both sides. I don't want to just be caught on one side, I want to fit in this world, not just as, you know I don't want to be this person and that person. Because I'm not one person anymore, you know I'm more than that. I'm not just Aboriginal there's more to me than just being Aboriginal, although it's a strong influence, there's more to me. (Drake, p.57-58, lines 1299-1304)

The verbal expression of identity can be difficult, with reactions of other people formed upon their expectations compounded against internal dynamics. For Shawn complexities of his identity comes through in his use of humour:

It was raining and I didn't want to go nowhere, I was bored. So I went to work the next day and my buddy goes, what did you do yesterday? I said nothing, I got so bored. I got so bored I started playing cowboys and Indians (laugh) and he goes how'd you do that? Well I'm half and half! And he starts laughing at me and says well how did you do that? I said easy, I just put on a half cowboy suit and a half Indian suit, and I had a pistol in one hand and a Tomahawk in another. And he started laughing at me, and he goes as crazy as you are, you are brilliant to think of something like that! (Shawn, p. 14, lines 425-432)

When others work to try and understand this experience, based upon their own lack of awareness, it can cause misunderstandings.

Mary Ann and Drake both shared a time when they were confronted with such a misunderstanding.

It's kind of funny when people like don't really know the, they are like, oh so you're Métis right, and I'm like do you know what that is? (Mary Ann, p. 45, lines 1024-1025)

No, I am Cree, I am Status, I'm not Métis. "Oh but you're half white". That doesn't matter, I am not Métis. I am not of the Métis Federation. (Drake, p.61, lines 1385-1386)

Mary Ann expressed that she has not shared these experiences with many people before and that she is still working out what this sounds like when she verbalizes her identity.

I don't know I think I have just gotten better at explaining it or verbalizing, I don't really, I have never really grown up and talked about it really with anybody,

besides you. I just kind of say you know my dad is Cree and I use the patriarchal lineage to identify myself. You know when I'm talking I say my dad is Cree all the time, I never say I'm Cree, I say my dad is Cree. But whatever, and but I've never really gotten into a nuanced discussion like this with anybody. So, ya that's the only thing I really say if I'm making a statement about it, I say my dad is Cree. (Mary Ann, pp. 33-34, lines 751-758)

Shawn found that his peers would try to compensate for his lack of full bloodedness through the way they spoke about it.

Like I knew I was not full Native, but I never thought about it. But then hanging around with (friend), late (friend) and them, I kind of always felt like they, they didn't really accept my white side of me. Even though they were close to me. Even though they were close. They would always ensure me, like if we were fooling around, they would go, "ya, you're Indian". You know, "be an Indian, you're an Indian". So from my point of view, I would say they encouraged me to go to that side of me. Even though on my mentality I accept both equally, because I am both equally and you can't change that. (Shawn, p. 4, lines 109-120)

When she was beginning her summer internship in 2007, Kelsey found it difficult to figure out how to explain who she was to research participants.

I think through the summer, even to that point I was still thinking how am I gonna connect with people, are people gonna accept me? I can tell people 'I am Indigenous', 'I am Métis'. At the time I was so confused, I'm like okay, ya, I am this, I will acknowledge this, but I really didn't understand, I didn't know what to say, I'm like even if I call myself this, is this a farce, like ha ha, you are just gonna claim this identity, like not really, really understanding what I looked like, or what that, it's very complex. (Kelsey, p. 12, lines 254-260)

Tell people...I'm one of them... I am Indigenous, I am something. Ya, but did I really know what that meant for myself? No. I never really thought about that at that point. (Kelsey, p. 12, lines 270-272)

A message that shone through was that there are unique ways in which people express their identity, and that it can be a personal struggle. Drake shared that this is a result of disconnection.

But it makes me question. But you know even today it makes me question, where am I, who am I? I know I am Aboriginal, but where do we belong anymore. (Drake, pp. 13-14, lines 296-298)

Shawn shared that it is important to consider the depth and totality of a person in order to come to know them, but that even in this struggles remain.

You see the more you put into a question the more definitive it can be. Instead of just saying who are you, Oh I'm Shawn, and that's it. But if you say who are you, where are you from, how old are you, then you just get a bigger, better picture. So me, I guess, it's just the same I guess. I am who I am. I know I'm both sides, I accept both sides, even though I do sometimes conflict within myself, who I try to be... But it's hard, when you have influential people telling you, oh stick to your own kind. See that is conflicting with me, because my own kind, there's two of my own kind in one body, how can I choose? So I decide not to choose, which is still a choice. So I say I don't choose who I am, because the choice I choose is me. Me as a person. But all in all, but like I said, I do, because of the way society is, I do find conflict sometimes. But I always try to iron that out, to try and say, well let them think what they think about me, I know myself who I am. I'm a mixed blood, and I'm okay with that, because I am a human, and that's what matters. (Shawn, pp. 23-24, lines 696-723)

Drake found that the questioning does not go away.

Being mixed really makes a person question themselves. And it gives them a big struggle in life. There is a struggle. I don't think it matters how successful you are. Or unsuccessful. It's a struggle. (Drake, p. 45, lines 1009-1014)

External visual identifiers. Skin colour was indicated by each participant as a factor in feeling comfortable in various situations, both within and outside of Indigenous contexts. This created situations where participants felt unrecognizable or invisible.

Mary Ann found that she liked when people had external cues to negotiate their socialized expectation of her identity.

I think it is just this, like having this sort of feeling about it on the inside, but not looking like it on the outside, and thinking about it, like the gaze, you know having people gaze at you and not have these cues that you feel like you should have... like actually in the summer is when I like it the most because I usually have my head shaved and its black and I'm tanned as hell, and I'm like there we go, this is me all the time. (Mary Ann, pp. 32-33, lines 718-743)

Kelsey found that in the beginning of her journey, she was looking for physical resemblance as a means of connection.

That first summer it was like processing through this, I think, like I think your identity is also like looking back on what your actual physical traits were, and I guess that's where I went to first for kind of like understanding of where I fit in. (Kelsey, p.16, lines 354-356)

Lack of clearly identifiable visual indicators was something that created discomfort within participants as identified by Mary Ann, Drake and Shawn below.

And then you know like, you know, not looking more...the way I look, so people would know and I wouldn't have to tell them and, you know? (Mary Ann, p. 4, lines 81-82)

It was that one comment that brought a lot, you know calling me white. And I don't feel like I fit anywhere anymore. You know it's hard. Sit in a room with a bunch of white people, non-Aboriginal, you know and I look like a piece of pepper. Sit in a room with a bunch of Aboriginal people and I look like a piece of salt. I can't win either way. (Drake, p. 9, lines 195-199)

I find that when lot of people look at me, they notice that I do have Native in me, and they ask that first, are you Native or part Native? I'll say well I'm part Native. And they'll be like okay. Sometimes they'll drop the subject, or sometimes they'll probe more. Because like you said, sometimes that does help with identity. Even though I could say I already know who I am, you know what I mean? Growing up this is what I used to say, I'm Native on the inside, even though I look white on the outside. (Shawn, p. 13, lines 392-398)

I'd like to be able to go and to, you know somewhere where there's a bunch of non-Aboriginal people, and just to walk in and feel comfortable, but I can't. And even though there's still that discomfort on my Aboriginal side, I feel more comfortable there. But then there's still those looks, right. (Drake, p.59, lines 1329-1332)

Privilege that comes with lightness of skin colour and the angst that this causes when processing how to create connection to Cree identity was expressed in depth by

Mary Ann:

I think for me I feel very, I feel like I've been born with kind of like a silver spoon shoved up my ass, like to put it in the most basic sort of terms, like I feel like I can absorb all the benefits of white culture, especially being like a young passing for white, standard kind of woman, but then also kind of have this knowledge of legitimacy, and sometimes I'm kind of like, I think like this is kind of the worst way to put it though, is like I can be like, oh no I'm actually different and I have these other qualities that, I'm not you, and I'm not the oppressors, and so I feel

like I can flit, I feel like I can discuss in both, like for my benefit, like I can use it for my benefit, which is really kind of a terrible way to put it, but that's kind of what I'm thinking when I think my darkest thoughts when your not really supposed to say aloud. You know I can make both work to the advantage for me. And I do, like I think I do. Like when I am talking and when I want to seem legitimate, and I do, and I'm like oh well, blah blah blah blah, and I'm like where did that motivation come from to, I do I play at both and sometimes that also like a complex guilt thing where like, cause like if I had the self confidence or whatever, you know would I need to do that so much, I don't know? (Mary Ann, pp. 27-28, lines 608-623)

While there were experiences of being unsure of what to call themselves, or how to indicate a sense of belonging or membership, there still existed an inner knowing or understanding that there was something within them that needed to be acknowledged. All four participants reflected upon this.

And it's wanting to, like it's the weird sort of ache that you feel this part of your life has to be involved, but then also not feeling, doing it to feel more like yourself but also at the same time you have this constant sort of tension and sweating and like you know you're not even though you're there you're never really comfortable in anywhere you are, right. (Mary Ann, p. 26, lines 584-588)

For me growing up, I accepted myself for who I am, even though both sides, they conflict with each other. you know people telling me, you're living here, and be who you are. I'm trying to be who I am, so what if I look white. Growing up being as a Native, that's who I am. But I'm also white, because it's in my genetics. So you just gotta balance it out. (Shawn, p. 27, lines 818-822)

Me if I had a choice, if it was ever given to me, the choice, you know if I could get rid of one side, it would always be I want to be Aboriginal, that's where it is, it's strong in me. And even if I wasn't raised there, I think it would still be strong in me... It makes you want to know where you belong in the world, who you are, and what you're meant to do. (Drake, pp. 62-63, lines 1411-1435)

That's completely how it is, I don't know, it's so crazy to think that your identity can be defined in different ways day to day, in your being challenged. And it's so insane where like, I feel more confident. Because I am wondering if this confidence can be read, because sometimes people are like, oh what, where's your home community. (Kelsey, p. 50, lines 1131-1138)

Wilfred reflected on an insecurity I shared about my own lack of visual touchstones for being Cree. He indicated I needed to take a trip to Cumberland House,

Saskatchewan. I needed to let go of expectations tied to identity. I was confused at first, then he shared:

But, you go to that community and you'll see red hair, freckles, blonde, blue eyed, all fluent Cree speakers, who are Cree. (Wilfred, p. 15, lines 339-340)

External judgments. Participants shared stories of external judgments and the impact that this can have on sense of identity. For example, Kelsey shared a time when she was mistaken within a First Nation community as someone who belonged there, who was a friend by a resident. It was a case of mistaken identity that created a moment of connection for her:

I remember thinking this is interesting, but to be confused for somebody from the community, and also gave me this kind of oh, maybe I kind of look Indigenous and I am not even aware of it... and I'm like, oh, okay, I do belong somewhere. (Kelsey, p. 14, lines 302-304)

For Mary Ann it is a fear of external judgment that underlies varying interactions.

Have you seen Lana Del Ray's video and she's wearing the big head dress, and I'm like um what did you do to earn that, I'm pretty sure that is a ceremonial male, usually male artifact, that you shouldn't appropriate like that, and that's pretty offensive... I'm always like, where I always have this double paranoia where ... if I do anything like that... say if I wanted to reengage in powwows or anything, like I wouldn't look enough to fit the part, and it's a constant stress that I might make somebody else feel uncomfortable because I'm not like, you know... I look such a certain way, especially with my hair dyed and stuff that I would feel like other people would judge me (Mary Ann, pp. 25-33 lines 548-735)

For Drake the external judgments meant that it was one group of friends dismissing a piece of his ancestry as negligible to their friendship with him, that they would be "colour blind" to that aspect for his benefit, or that he will never truly be accepted as belonging.

At first I didn't know any different, but then as I got older things started to change. Because like I said people would make remarks about the Cree side, people would make remarks about the white side. And it started to bother me. When I started to understand what racism was, it really started to bother me. You know. And I

would sit there, I sat there with my Aboriginal friends, and they would make remarks about white people. Come on now, you're putting part of me down. You know, and I'm supposed to sit here and take this. This is who I am. That's when some of them, oh you're Native, you're Aboriginal, we don't care about that side of you, we don't see that side of you. You're all this, but that's who I am. This is who I am. you're putting down a part of me, you know. It didn't hurt as much, but when non-Aboriginal friends would make comments, that's where it really hurt, like painfully hurt. Like why would you say that about me. Because I identify with that side more, right. And it's like growing up, start to not feel like I fit in anywhere. (Drake, pp. 27-28, lines 614-626)

And so, even our own people can't just accept us for who we are, as soon as we say that, oh you're Métis? No. It happens everywhere. Like, I don't know at any point, at any point in life if we will ever completely fit in anywhere. (Drake, p. 61, lines 1380-1386)

For Shawn, separate instances of charity highlighted the difference in judgments and perceptions of other people to his identity.

I know it made me feel good, but it also upset me too sometimes. Because I was walking down the street having my coffee, this actually happened twice but reverse. I'm not sure who came first. But I remember walking by and there's this guy sitting there. It was a Native guy, and he asked if I could help him out, I said okay, I gave him some change, and I gave him, I bought him a coffee. I bought him a coffee and some change. And I ended up walking home because that was my bus change. And the last thing he said to me was, for a lot of white people, you're a good person. How could he not have seen my Native side, which kind of upset me. And there was this other guy, a white guy. And he pretty much said the same thing, but his words were, you don't see a lot of Native people helping out white guys. So the same thing too. I was like, I felt good that I helped them out. He just wanted some change, so I gave him a five dollar bill. But in his eyes I looked totally Native, but maybe it was because it was summer and I looked kind of tanned. But you know, he did not recognize my white side, but he still had that gratitude, both of them did, which made me feel good. But inside I was still upset because they didn't see my other side. (Shawn, p. 18, lines 526-541)

Concern for the impact of external judgments on the younger generations of children to come was shared by Drake.

(T)hat's who I am. People ask me, that's my background, that's my children's background. That's, my daughter's the whitest little Native girl you'll ever see. But that's who she is, she's an Aboriginal girl. Regardless of who her mother is, and how much blood is in her... It's unfortunate that my young daughter will be fighting that her whole life. I will always be telling her you are Aboriginal, you

are... regardless of the colour of your skin, you are Aboriginal, you are Fox Lake, you are a descendant of me, you are a descendant of your great-grandfather. And she will struggle, but she will still. But I hope she will still be proud of that background. Because I know there's a struggle, and I am still proud of my background. (Drake, pp. 6-42, lines 123-938)

Confidence in self-identity. Related to external judgments, Mary Ann and Kelsey both shared conflict in the confidence or ability to self-identify. For Mary Ann this questioning is layered and has multiple points of examination. She finds that the complexity of her connections and disconnections are important for her to acknowledge.

Well like its weird for me too, like my mom, like she, like my, my Native name is actually, like Dakota... Yvonne's grandmother gave it to me... even when I was doing these Sundances and Powwows and stuff, it was in Sioux Valley, and it wasn't, I never had the connection with Gillam and the reserve up there which is kind of like where it came from. And so it's kind of interesting of the layer upon layer, cause you know that's what I'm kind of finding now with this, like after not going for Sundances for a long time, you know my only connection to these people, or to that ritual is through Yvonne. And you know I keep on thinking when she's gone, or not really into doing that anymore I won't have a connection with that community anymore. And I've never really had a chance to make one with up there either (Gillam, traditional territory of Fox Lake Cree Nation). What do you do? I don't know, but it's like weird layers of identity. (Mary Ann, pp. 7-8, lines 156-166)

For Kelsey it was a point of reflection, the implications of claiming Cree identity including the fluctuations that can occur and what this means personally and in her educational and work experiences:

That's completely how it is, I don't know, it's so crazy to think that your identity can be defined in different ways day to day, in your being challenged. And it's so insane where like, I feel more confident. Because I am wondering if this confident can be read, because sometimes people are like, oh what, where's your home community. (Kelsey, p. 50, lines 1131-1138)

I think one of the powerful pieces that you shared with me was the lecture from Thomas King, you know I'm not the Indian you had in mind. So that was part of that process of like, I don't have to look a certain way, I don't have to be a certain way. But I guess there's like this pressure in my mind when I was trying to fit and trying to understand this piece of me. It was such a struggle. You know I often need that reminder, I need that reminder from Thomas King and when I was

working in that Opikihiwawin program I think that's something I still kind of struggled with. Struggle with that piece, is how, how Aboriginal am I? It's so confusing. Just the other day someone said to me, you know I thought there would be more Aboriginal representation in our classes. And I'm like well I'm Aboriginal, and she said well are you Métis? And I'm like, I don't identify as Métis, but if your understanding of Métis is someone who has more than Aboriginal, they have something else, but then I guess I fit into your understanding of that. But that's not how I see myself and how I identify. Like I see myself as First Nations, so, you know what I mean. Sometimes I feel like I have to even defend that, and it's so confusing. (Kelsey, pp.48-49, lines 1093-1107)

Belinda expressed the way that she felt when she had come to a healthy way of viewing her identity, and the impact of her healing process.

I knew I was home, in my heart and my spirit I knew where I came from. And so is that identity? To me it was, I knew where I was from. And I knew where I belonged, I knew I belonged somewhere. I wasn't being kicked around anymore. (Belinda, p.29, lines 659-661)

Wellbeing

Wellbeing is intricately connected to experiences of identity. Participants shared influential relationships, the role of spirituality and ceremonies and methods of healing in the stories shared about their search to understand who they are in relation to the world around them.

Influential relationships. Participants shared influential relationships that served as foundations from which to explore and come to understand their identity.

Drake found that my father held an important role for him in connecting him to the stories of his great grandfather. This connection to who his ancestors are have provided an important source of identity for Drake.

Well there's a lot of people. Well my mother, she raised me and everything. And there's the people that I work with over time, like your father... you know, never let me forget who I was. Never forget who I came from, where I came from. My grandfather, I am proud of who he was. It is nice. And he always tells me, you remind me so much of him. The way you look, the way you act, and how you

present yourself to people. Just the way you think and everything. I wish I got to know this man. He died when I was a baby, so I never had that chance. (Drake, pp. 15-17, lines 324-383)

Mary Ann found several relationships influenced her understanding of her identity. Her connection through ceremony existed with Yvonne, an important and influential mentor in her life. Mary Ann also expressed how her relationship with her dad fostered a connection to her great-grandmother Gladys Moose. Finally, Mary Ann also shared how her mom worked hard to maintain a cultural connection for her.

Yvonne for one thing, she was kind of that foster connection. And well I suppose, like Dad, and the mythology of Dad ... we only got to see him only like once or twice a year, and you know in those two weeks he was like rock star, right, and I thought he was like the coolest, and just like... I remember when he was young, and like had his long ponytail and hair... he just kind of always uses language too, like you know Indian, and your Granny, and he just kind of reinforces that with his use of language all the time... so identifying kind of with that, like he really intensifies it within himself... Well my mom too... when I was younger she was always very concerned about keeping that, like I think that she did always feel very concerned that we did live in BC and she did want to have that option for me. So she was very encouraging and trying to help me with that, and foster that for me. Like I remember when she was, when I was a little kid, like she would always try and buy me Native storybooks and kind of like, try and the best she could, try and keep that part, it's kind of hard, but it's good. (Mary Ann, pp. 12-13, lines 268-284)

Shawn shared that his relationship with his grandfather was an important influence that helped him to navigate identity and connection.

All I can say is if my Grandpa was still alive, he was always there. He always kept me on, I guess you could say the forward path. the right path. He did, for me, he didn't try to push me to understanding who I was. The way I saw it he helped me to help myself to understand myself. (Shawn, p. 8, lines 231-234)

Kelsey spoke about her mom and her grandma and how both women were important for her understanding of herself and her identity.

And it's so great to have that connection. And I guess just going with my Grandma and then going with my mom, it was like, I guess I was talking about before, like me starting to look more into my identity, starting to look into what

has happened in our family. It kind of pushed my mom, and kind of pushed my aunt, she was moving toward that direction too. You know you don't realize you need to bring it up, you need to ask, because people don't like, oh I should tell you about my childhood, or I should tell you about this. Unless it comes up in conversation, its not something that people tell you about. (Kelsey, pp. 46-47, lines 1054-1061)

I remember her (Grandma) saying things like, oh I hated the nuns, and I was like what does that even mean, and I was like oh what a terrible school she was at, you know, like I had no idea. So it was like the process of learning about her life, and understanding what that is, but also having the context of from what I was learning about residential schools, learning about Aboriginal history, learning about hydro, learning about different peoples communities, and how complex that is and peoples' lives there, and I mean it was just, it was so much in four months. (Kelsey, p. 21, lines 462-468)

These connections bring with them a sense of belonging, as expressed by Mary Ann and Kelsey in the passages below.

(L)ike my mom was, you know as a white woman, she was always very, well when I was younger she was more intent than dad was to keeping me in touch to my Native heritage, right, then dad got into it, but she was the one that felt it was important for me, or that it was going to be important for me. And it was, right, so it did help foster my wellbeing, it helped make me a well rounded, a sort of well rounded person, or trying to be anyways, trying to get there... I'm always coming at it from the perspective of wanting to ... understand more, but it also makes me feel very enriched, and it makes me feel good to know that I am part of this continuous thing. Like when I read certain things in books, it just makes me feel, or when I am learning certain things that just make me feel more connected to communities and peoples, like I haven't even engaged with, and sometimes I don't feel like self confident enough to, ever. But it does make me feel, I don't know, good. (Mary Ann, pp. 36-37, lines 815-827)

People see me as belonging, so I think that was kind of really huge we were like looking at pictures on the wall and looking at names and all that. And I was like oh my gosh we look so much more like the people here (laughs). You know, I haven't experienced that, you know living in Manitoba, like I think that was part of the whole thing that was difficult in identifying physically. Like trying to understand what it meant, you know how I fit in. (Kelsey, p. 48, lines 1082-1087)

Belinda shared that for her there were foundational relationships and connections between her and her grandparents that allowed her a sense of who she is.

So anyways there I am. And I slept with my grandmother every night. I slept with my granny every night, her back and my back. Big flannel blanket of goose down feathers. And just cuddling. And we had around our bed the mosquito net, all the way around the bed. And so I slept against the wall, and my grandmother there, and it was just the safest place in the world. (Belinda, p. 6, lines 129-134)

Lack of connection was also influential, as Drake shared when he reflected on a void in his supportive relationships.

I didn't really have a lot of encouraging. So a lot of it was done on my own, or close friends, who believed in me. So, sometimes I still feel like I'm adolescent, still struggling with life, trying to get things back on track. (Drake, p.47, lines 1056-1058)

Role of spirituality and connection to ceremonies. Participants shared the manner in which spirituality and connection to ceremonies supported their journey towards wellbeing and coming to understand and express their identity.

Drake spoke about the connection between the roles that we hold and the responsibilities we have to others around us. He expressed how important wellbeing is within his life and that even though there are struggles, it is important for him to connect to traditional teachings.

Wellbeing. Well, I don't know which side to start on. When it comes to my health. When it comes to who I am as a person, how I feel I should be, as far as being a father. Being a family person, a brother, sister, uncle, cousin, niece, nephew. Everything like that is influenced by my Aboriginal side. That's what has an influence on how I feel I should be. Even though there are struggles in my life, because of being, I believe it's because of my mixture, and it comes from the struggles of the adverse effects of my mother and my grandparents. I still believe in those values. We talk about them all the time, that is the biggest influence on who I wanna be and who I should be. And I don't know if I would have those thoughts if I wasn't Aboriginal. You know there's a lot of pros and cons to it. As far as, as much as the struggles are in life because of my mixture, my Aboriginal side has a big influence on who I am. And it's more good than bad. I wanna learn these traditions, I wanna know more about the seven teachings, the medicine wheel. I wanna follow those values. But that medicine wheel is a big thing for me. Just the four colours of it make me understand that there is not room in my life for racism, for prejudice, for any kind of hatred towards anybody. And because I'm

mixed blood it even makes it more important, because I have to be accepting of both my selves. (Drake, pp. 47-49, lines 1072-1099)

Shawn found that wellbeing and identity are unable to be thought of in a separate manner.

They are intricately connected.

And it doesn't matter what nationality or race, or whatever you come from. Your identity, how can I say this. Both need each other. Identity needs your wellbeing, and vice versa, your wellbeing brings out your identity. For me my well being is like pretty much, knowing who I am. Accepting who I am. Accepting people for who I am, whether it's a negative outcomes or a positive outcomes, because that's what they think. I don't really worry about what they think, just how I feel about myself. Like, I get up every day and I tell myself, I am who I am, today's going to be a good day. (Shawn, p. 16, lines 467-474)

Mary Ann shared how important it is for her wellbeing that she become reconnected to her identity even though this is an area she struggles with internally and has attempted to work through in an artistic manner.

And it really kind of stresses me out that I am not engaged, like I am super interested in engaging with it, but just like I don't really have access to it, and so it's something I feel deeply, deeply connected with, like touched with, but it's hard to access and so I was trying to kind of struggle with that in my work, but I felt like it wasn't coming easy. (Mary Ann, p. 18, lines 400-404)

Connection to ceremonies were areas that were identified as important. Mary Ann expressed the importance of reconnecting with ceremonies and how she stopped participating as a teenager.

I really want to do the Sundance this year, like I really, really... it's my total dream to go back there and like do it, and re-foster that connection. And once I kind of get back into it, cause I remember how I, well how I stopped fancy dress shawl dancing was when my mom, when I grew out of one of my uniforms, and I needed one for when I was a teenager. My mom paid the lady and she spent all the money and never made it. And so like we just didn't have enough for another outfit... that skipped a year, and I couldn't go compete anymore, because I was so out of practice... I used to love doing it so much. (Mary Ann, p. 40, lines 903-912)

Kelsey found that as she learned more about the teachings behind ceremony such as smudging, she was able to feel more connected to the process of smudging. She found that it was a helpful tool for her wellbeing.

I also became a lot more comfortable with smudging. And (practicum supervisor) was a very good teacher in the sense that like why we do certain things, and going through that. And I think when you don't know much about something it can feel uncomfortable. It can feel awkward, you don't know, am I doing it right, am I doing it this, you know. But having an understanding of why you do things, and then going through it, you realize, I mean when I first started really smudging. I mean I remember being nervous and thinking I hope I'm not the person who has to start the, you know put the bundle together and light it. Because I'm gonna drop the shell and people are gonna be like, get out of here. You know. But it was so great to see like everybody took a turn doing that, and we all go in a circle and she explained why we were doing it. And she explained why it's, basically like a prayer and you can use it to help focus and protect and all that kind of, cause she talked about the different parts of our bodies and how we can cleanse ourselves and how we can protect ourselves. And I remember going through the physical process of it. It's kind of like a meditation, it's almost like, I don't know, surreal. And I, it's very calming, and I've never experienced that sense of calm, like when I've smudged, so it was really great. Because she was able to connect me with that. And I remember she would invite me to things, like she said I'm going to having a moon ceremony, and she runs those, and I'm like, I've never been to a moon ceremony, you know... And I remember being very welcomed and very accepted. And it felt very good being there... I felt so honoured to be there. (Kelsey, pp. 38-40, lines 866-904)

Kelsey also shared how receiving her name in ceremony was an important moment of healing for her. It helped her to connect with the idea that she has a gift and something to offer.

I said, I'm like I really, really struggle with this, with like knowing myself, and feeling comfortable, and knowing who I am and understanding my culture and understanding more of a spiritual piece of my life. And they were like okay, let's pray about it. So they were praying in their language. And then they told me my name was Carries a Pipe Woman, and I was just like shocked. And I said to them like are you sure (laughs) but I don't mean to be disrespectful. I mean of all the stories and teaching I know about the pipe is very significant and I know its about knowledge and I was like are you sure. (Kelsey, p. 67, lines 1518-1525)

I think that's really, really obviously important for my wellbeing, and I think that has obviously impacted my self confidence and my self esteem and knowing that

I'm special knowing that I have something to offer. (Kelsey, p. 72, lines 1635-1637)

In the same instance Kelsey and Mary Ann both shared that participating in ceremonies was also seen as difficult to overcome internally:

And I remember everyone was smudging and we were sitting at another table with someone who was a sexually exploited youth. And they are like oh you should smudge. It will make you feel better. And I was like I don't know, I feel sort of uncomfortable. I don't know what that means. I never really had done it a lot. (Kelsey, p. 62, lines 1411-1414)

And I don't know I guess I always feel like I don't really know if I have an in anywhere, and there's lots of ceremonies and stuff, and there's actually like a sweat that's going on, I just got an email about, put on by people from the University, but I never feel like, I always feel like when I go to these things, I'm out of my community and it's hard to put yourself out here and be like hey I'm here too to do these things. (Mary Ann, p. 42, lines 938-942)

Methods towards healing. While methods that participants used along their journey of healing was not expressed as much in the interviews, there was a sense that this is something that each of them are beginning to explore and engage with in coming to know their identity. Participants shared the importance in understanding who they are, to be able to express and have confidence in their identity.

Kelsey found that her healing journey was influenced by the experiences leading up to and since her summer in 2007. Different events since then have worked to support her connection to herself and her family.

You know even explaining it to people, what I was doing that summer. That was a whole other piece. Like why would you want to that. I mean (laughs) I'm like, really. But ya I had so many complex feelings that summer. And I think was also, upset, definitely a lot of crying, a lot of anger, a lot of hurt. I don't know, it was really, it was really incredible, I think like I felt like I lived 10 years in four months, that's what I mean it was so many different aspects of my life, I didn't really expect it to impact and be this big thing. I thought this is work, this is maybe school related. Maybe this will help me understand what I wanted to do for school. I didn't realize it would impact my relationship with my Grandma, impact my relationship with my family, because I was starting to talk about this... I think

of the events that have happened in my life and when they've happened and who I've met and how this has helped me. You know I think okay what if I didn't start that position, would I have gone to social work? Would I have really done exploring this? I don't know. And so its kind of significant as well to realize I am where I am because of those I have met and the people I have in my life, but things could be different (Kelsey, pp. 24-52, lines 543-1172)

I think having more confidence, having a better understanding of myself, like I was talking about before with working with other, it's really important taking care of yourself and knowing yourself and kind of trying to understanding how that's going to impact others. I think having more comfort with my culture, having more comfort with my spirituality, I think its more balanced in my life. And I think that's a lot more healthy, it's a lot more healthy for all my relationships. (Kelsey, pp. 71-72, lines 1622-1629)

Shawn shared that an important method for healing will be in building awareness within others.

And then for, for my wellbeing, maybe that is something that can help me out. If people could just take the blinds off, you know, not just me, for anybody who's mixed blood, take the blinds off you know, just see them for both sides of who they are. Instead of just picking sides. Cause back to younger days, come to think of it, to now. A lot of that choosing sides, leaves negative effects on anyone. I know, and obviously you know. (Shawn, p. 18, lines 551-556)

Mary Ann shared her experiences utilizing the arts as an avenue for engagement with identity and healing.

I had an installation room and ... I made this giant dream catcher, it was probably about the size of the living room. It was in the Penticton Art Gallery and I poured molasses all over it, and it was a protest piece for the Olympics, I didn't have any artist statement or anything on it, but I just had this giant, wire dream catcher and poured molasses all over it, and just left it, and it left this big gooey mess all over the floor and like, people stepped in it and left their stuff. That one worked. But then I did another one and I did an installation room and I covered the floor with flour and I did a whole bunch of dream catchers and stuff and then I kinda had like drum beats happening, and it didn't work, just for the space, like I wanted people to like, something about the flour, cause it was like dough, and bannock and like that sort of thing, but the space wasn't big enough, cause what I wanted really was to have flour on the ground and then a lure in the middle that you went to inspect, and then when you left you left like a flour all over the place in like these trails, but it didn't work, cause I didn't have enough space and then it ended up being kind of hokey, cause with the dream catchers and the drums. So I think if I did it next time I would still be interested in doing the flour, or maybe like

kneading dough, or making fried bannock or something in the middle and then we would leave and have flour, and then I don't know if the drum beats or anything are necessary, I think it would just make it more kitschy... I guess you know the metaphor is kind of easy... We leave traces, with the footprints and stuff, and it degrades more as people walk in... they leave dirt in it and stuff. So I'd like to kind of re-engage... So maybe sometime I could re-visit it. (Mary Ann, pp. 19-20, lines 413-445)

Belinda describes the necessity of having conversations about identity, and about overcoming internalized colonization and working towards healing.

But I love talking about this kind of stuff because it's so important. It is important to me as a human being you know from one human being to another. Cause I want you to love yourself, I want you to feel good. I don't care who you are, just feel good (Belinda, p. 32, lines 726-729)

Belinda also indicated that conversations, relationships, and awareness are methods to work towards healing.

To me cultural identity is so, it's something that we have to talk about all over. You know why is there shame in who we are. That's been hundreds of years, hundred of years. When will that stop? You and me have to stop this. (Belinda, p.39, lines 870-872)

Drake and Shawn both shared that the conversations for this project were helpful and powerful mechanisms in and of themselves.

So this is very helpful. And that's what I was saying, it helps me to understand more of who I am. (Drake, p. 56, lines 1271-1272)

Actually you know what, coming here, before coming here I was thinking about this, you know how is this going to make me feel? It's an experience for me actually. Even though like I say, in my head I know who I am, but actually talking about it makes you think. It helps me understand even more than I figured I understood. (Shawn, p. 27, lines 826-829)

You know even when we leave today, when this is done, it's still going to happen, tomorrow's another day, I'm still going to have to face these situations and deal with them, but the thing is we have to do it in a positive way. Whether if you are doing it for yourself or doing it for somebody. See like for an example, you are doing this in a positive way to help others, such as you're helping me, but on the same thing you're doing it for yourself. And vice versa, because you're helping

me in a positive way to understand, I'm helping you out too. (Shawn, p. 28, lines 836-842)

Final reflection

When I think of the experiences of coming to know who we are, it is about connecting with ourselves, and then being able to express that self within the world in a manner that supports wellbeing and healing. When I was sitting in reflection of myself and my journey towards wellbeing, I knew that it was inherently connected to who I was as a Muskego Inninew Iskwew. A lot of my thinking deeply occurred about these experiences and how to come to a place of healing.

And so I think I had to come back to this space that I was once a child, the home(s) that I was raised in, the memories that I have of each place in order to address my wounded self and move towards healing. This reminds me of the day vision that I had where I was in a suit of armour standing in a beautiful field, and realized I could not move – I looked down and saw that I was carrying a heavy load, one that kept my feet cemented to the ground. Once my awareness allowed me to perceive this, I was able to dismantle the armour, experiencing my body and my self in a new way – enjoying the beauty of the world around me – dancing in a way that I had only imagined others could dance. The thought of this vision brings me such happiness and joy. (Rowe, June 2011)

The vision that I shared above was a monumental moment for me. It was about being able to shake off the stagnation of internalized colonization and move forward. To uncover who I was at my core, away from the shielding that I had taught myself to do in response to internal and external forces of racism, stereotypes, judgments, shame, and disconnection.

Summary

The overall goal of this research was to create a space for individuals to share personal and ancestral stories, to express the impacts of systems, relationships, and the ways in which people come to understand mino-pimatisiwin and Niwâkomâkanak in

personal identity development and wellbeing. A Muskego Inninuwuk methodology was utilized to explore personal and ancestral stories facilitated through natural conversations. Conversations took place with seven participants, three Cree Elders and four mixed-blood Cree individuals. An iterative meaning making process was undertaken with participants to ensure that the meanings and intentions underlying the stories that were shared remained intact in the presentation of the findings. Findings were presented as condensed conversation and common experiences.

Elders shared with me stories of disconnection, intergenerational experiences, from the natural progression of Cree identity development as impacts of colonization. Each shared their stories of re-connection and healing. The common experiences of mixed blood participants highlighted the impact of colonization on their understandings and expressions of who they are, the complexity of their experiences of identity, and how their understanding of wellbeing is connected.

We can be weighed down, we can live forever defined, or we can define, we can change the stories we live within, what we use those stories for. We can choose to use the stories of our lives to connect with those around us – to build awareness, community, to promote action. The personal, ancestral, relational stories shared in this chapter have highlighted the necessity of coming to hear, to witness, to engage with the stories of ourselves and others. Verbalizing stories is a means of connection, growth and healing. The following chapter will connect these stories with literature reviewed in Chapter Two, discuss implications to social work policy and the impact on individuals, families and community, and highlight areas of opportunity for future research.

Chapter Five - Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to come to understand the experiences of individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous (Cree) and non-Indigenous ancestry utilizing a Muskego Inninuwuk methodology. This final chapter will consider the stories of participants in relation to the original research questions and objectives and research presented within the literature review completed in Chapter Two. Next, a discussion of the limitations of the research and findings will be presented. Finally an overview of the implications for this study in relation to social work policy and future research will be communicated.

Healing, Decolonization and Resurgence

This project has been an undertaking of healing, decolonization and resurgence. Sharing and reconnecting with stories of ancestors, families and communities, and drawing the lines between these stories and our own personal journeys impacts healing. There is a deeply therapeutic process when we come to voice our stories and hear the stories of others. An impact of internalized colonization has been a disconnection from our own sense of self-determination and power, and disassociation from our own voices. Creating a space the honours knowledges shared through personal experiential journeys of healing can be a mechanism to reconnect with our own inherent power and value. In this was healing is also connected to a process of decolonization.

Decolonization is a process where an individual understands their own colonized state and then engages in a process of liberation from, adaptation to, or survival of those oppressive conditions (Yellow Bird, 2008). Part of a decolonization process includes

rediscovering and reconnecting with a sense of identity, reconnecting with your self, remembering who you are and where you come from. Laenui (2000) describes the third of five processes of decolonization as dreaming; where individuals explore their cultures, centre their own histories, worldviews, and Indigenous knowledge systems in order to imagine possibilities and alternative realities. This works to create a location from which to vision the future and can eventually translate into social action and change.

Decolonization is only a partial answer, as this addresses the relationship that has been created through the existence of colonizer and colonized and the internalization of oppression. A more complete picture includes resurgence and liberation (Simpson, 2006; 2011). Storytelling challenges the status quo and is at the core a decolonizing act. They can challenge the spaces in which we live and interact, urging us to rethink, deconstruct and reconstruct these spaces (McLeod, 2007). As a process of remembering, visioning and creating, stories become a lens to allow us to dream and implement a future.

Métis Elder Maria Campbell explained this teaching to me in terms of resistance and resurgence. She told me that acts of resistance are like throwing a stone into water. The stone makes its initial impact in the water, displacing it and eventually sinking to the bottom. There is the original splash the act of resistance makes, and the stone (or the act) sinks to the bottom, resting in place and time. But there are also more subtle waves of disruption that ripple or echo out from where the stone impacted the water. The concentric circles are more nuanced than the initial splash, but they remain in the water long after the initial splash is gone. Their path of influence covers a much larger area than the initial splash, radiating outward for a much longer period of time (Simpson, 2011, p. 145).

It is the rippling impact of the concentric circles radiating out from the initial act of resistance that provides strength and courage for others to resist and engage in resurgence. Re-engaging with voice, healing, decolonizing and resurging, are all acts of resistance, influenced by the stories of others, and as through their own acting their stories are also influencing others to come: radiating circles of resistance. These stories need to be told

over and over and over again. They are ways to create love and hope, to connect with our self and with others, and to heal.

What has been shared in this project is the culmination of an important personal and educational journey. This research was a deeply personal process. As a Muskego Innineew Iskewew (Swampy Cree woman) of mixed ancestry, I grew up impacted by colonization, by legislated identities, by racism and stereotypes, by the mythical portrait of the savage Indian, and by the inter generational impacts of hydro electric development upon my family and my community. As I grew up though, I did not have the words to share these experiences, I only observed the way they played out in my life.

As I became an adult I started to search and to ask, who am I, where do I belong, and how did I learn to be this way? With various catalysts my search ebbed and flowed. Throughout these processes I figured out that there are other people out there who are like me. I was not alone in my shame, my disconnection, my questioning, and in my wanting to feel connected and like I belonged to something. I started to learn that others felt this way too, and this made me feel not so alone. For me this is a journey of healing, decolonization and resurgence. I knew that this would be an important journey for me, if I could only make it through the process.

I have been impacted in completing the meaning making and coming to sit in reflection with the stories shared by participants and the meaning they hold in my own journey. I have grown through the process of developing, implementing and writing for this research. This can be articulated through a journal entry in which I shared a dream and how it fit into my own healing process:

This dream occurred a couple of years ago. I dreamt of an Elder I was bringing a class of students to a sweat lodge ceremony she was leading. We were in strange

surroundings: it seemed like a swimming pool, with the little blue and white tiles. I had brought this class to her ceremony and she was sharing teachings about the sweat, preparing the women. She said, before we go in, I have one more ceremony to perform. She was dropping water droplets on the foreheads of each of the women. She came to me and said, wait, I have something else I need to do for you. She tilted my head back and with a tool she scraped at the exposed skin on my voice box. I was bleeding, but was not in pain, it did not hurt. When she was done, she said, okay, we are ready. She led us down many, many stairs into the lodge.

I spoke about my dream with Rachel, something I have done often as she is not only someone who is very intuitive, perceptive, and gifted in listening to and interpreting dreams but she has been an important person for supporting me in my reconnection, development and growth. In very brief summary, she said, Gladys! This means you have something very important to say, it is about your voice, your voice box, you need to speak. I was moved by this reflection as I continued to struggle with worthiness of my stories and voice.

A few weeks later I offered tobacco to the Elder to share with her the dream. In brief, she shared with me the important of women as the keepers of water and life. She urged me to attend a Full Moon Ceremony that was happening in a couple of weeks. She told me to bring, with other things, yellow broadcloth: which I had sitting in my closet for months – I purchased it at the same time I needed red broadcloth. I bought this yellow broadcloth on an instinct and had not known why until now, months later.

Needless to say, I did not attend. I was going to; I was prepared up until that evening when my panic, anxiety and shame took over. I felt paralyzed. To place myself into a situation where I did not know anyone, when I did not look like I belonged was too much for me to handle.

A few months later I got a call from a Cree Elder, who I had asked to help me in receiving a spirit name. I had asked him about a year earlier. But timing, child care, and shame all at some point or another got in the way of me biting the proverbial bullet and moving through my fear to attend the ceremony with him. This time, in August of 2012 he made no room for my excuses. I prepared, did a lot of self-talk, breathing and did it. I moved through the internal hurt and fear and feelings of unworthiness and went. As we drove that morning I could feel the knot in my stomach growing. I had no choice but to be there.

My name, given by another Elder is Kokookuhoo Tipiska 'wepesim Iskwew (Owl Moon Woman). It was like a light bulb was switched on for me when he shared with me the meaning of my name. I was given my colours and told I had responsibilities at the time of the Full Moon. I am to attend thirteen consecutive Full Moon ceremonies. I came home that night feeling powerful. Feeling like something inside me had connected. And then the doubt and shame kicked in again. But, in the end, that day was movement: a step forward.

A couple of weeks ago, a conference happened in Winnipeg, the 2nd International Indigenous Voices in Social Work (IIVSW) conference, of which I had the honour of coordinating. Not only was this conference an important opportunity in Indigenous social work, but it was a personal growth for me. In the year leading up to it, I was forced often, to face head on my fears, my insecurities and my doubt in myself. It became particularly challenging as I started to listen to the stories of participants in my thesis research at the same time.

Throughout the week of the IIVSW conference I experienced more confidence in myself than I had experienced ever. I believed that my story, in the sea of everyone around me, was important too. Just as I worked to honour the stories of the participants in my research project, I learned from them, I too, needed to raise my voice.

On the last day of the conference there was a closing ceremony. The Elder I dreamt of, while preparing to give a closing prayer, also shared a story. She told the crowd about her first experience of attending a Full Moon ceremony. She shared her tentativeness; the feeling of insecurity in knowing why she was there and what she was to do. She listened and watched as each woman in the circle went around and sounded their voice. Then it came to her. On stage she mimicked the first sounding of her voice: trembling and quiet. Then she was encouraged forward by the other women: who indicated they would stay in circle until Margaret sounded her voice loudly and strong. She tried a couple more times. On stage she mimicked the process of sounding her voice, a little louder, a little stronger until finally she took a deep breath and with confidence and strength sounded her voice, a powerful and vibrant sounding.

As she stood on stage sharing her story, I felt my throat tightening and my eyes welling. What I was witnessing on stage connected to my spirit: spoke to me, and prodded me to move forward. Allowed me to recognize the growth that I had experienced through the last couple of years: to sound my voice and to embrace what my spirit already knows is there. (Rowe, July 28, 2013)

Meaning making and change are both ongoing processes, as we come to hear stories, engage with those stories, and incorporate meaning from these stories, we grow. We are impacted by our relationships with everyone and everything around us. Just as I have reflected that my growth in healing, decolonization and resurgence has been a process of coming to today, I know that this is not the end. This is not the end for me or

for those who have shared their stories with me. We are continually learning and making meaning.

In sharing our stories we impact our own healing and we also connect with those around us. The stories shared by participants have impacted my own healing and have the potential to impact the healing journeys of those who read the experiences that were shared. They have the ability to reach out of the pages and let people know that they are not alone, there is hope, there is healing.

Connection to Research: Review of literature

To begin to uncover experiences of mixed-blood Cree individuals, the following research questions were undertaken: 1. How do individuals who identify as possessing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry experience their identities; and, 2. How do the concepts of Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin influence the development of identity?

An important lesson is shared within the stories of mixed-blood Cree individuals and Cree Elders: when considering the implications of colonization upon the lives of individuals and intergenerational experiences in families, we must return our gaze to the forces that have caused this disconnect. As social workers, we are confronted with the symptoms of this disconnection. Colonization has critically severed healthy collective identities and necessary sustaining relationships (Palmater, 2011). Drake, Kelsey, Mary Ann, and Shawn each reveal the influence of previous generations on their own sense of wellbeing and identity. Kelsey shares her frustration about her lack of awareness about the history of her family and her belief that this was connected to Indian residential schools, lack of Indigenous-centered history and stereotypes perpetuated within society.

All of these are interwoven with her grandmother's and mother's experiences of being removed from their community of origin due to the *Indian Act*. Each of the people I sat in conversation with shared their understanding of identity and how this has been influenced by government, including the way in which the government's labeling has been or has not been incorporated into their overall identity. Mary Ann spoke about the disconnection from her community of ancestry and the impact this has on her sense of belonging. Drake shares the impact of intergenerational trauma as displayed through lateral violence on disconnecting him from his community of origin. Shawn shares how a loss of the Cree language has impacted his relationship with his grandmother. Through engaging with the colonial realities of Indigenous peoples around us, we can come to understand and honour the diversity of these stories as impacts of colonization upon wellbeing.

Sue and Sue (1999; 2003) indicate difficulty navigating between the expectations of dominant society, and the process undertaken to ensure positive racial identity experiences. The five stages discussed include: 1. conformity, 2. dissonance, 3. resistance, and 4. immersion, 5. introspection and integrative awareness. Individuals who begin by identifying with dominant society can experience internalization of shame possibly coming to awareness and appreciation for the positive aspects of their culture, eventually challenging racism and oppression, and developing an inner sense of security. In describing their own journeys, Kelsey and Mary Ann in particular connect to each of these processes. Kelsey describes her experience of blending into dominant society, coming to an awareness of personal and family history related to Cree identity, resistance to stereotypes and legislation determining membership, in particular when an opportunity to apply for Status through Bill C-3 became available in 2012. Finally, in her stories,

Kelsey expresses how her ability to be immersed within aspects of her Cree culture have allowed for introspection about how this is related to her understanding of her identity.

Mary Ann shared her experiences of resistance and immersion within dominant and Cree cultures. She shared her awareness and experience of internal and external barriers that keep her from coming to a solid sense of her Cree identity as it relates to her overall sense of self. For her this is still very much a work of struggle and introspection.

Mihesuah (1998) and Sue and Sue (1999; 2003) work to understand the role of racism, stereotypes, internalization, and marginalization within the experiences of racial identity development. Drake and Shawn both describe experiences of exclusion and racism by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers within their stories. They share their understanding of these experiences and how it relates to how they see themselves. Shawn describes this as containing both 'cowboy and Indian' within his being. For Drake, when he was with his Cree friends they would ignore his Caucasian blood, or with his Caucasian friends they would ignore his Cree blood. For Shawn, peers would chide him to *act Indian, be Indian*. He also shares experiences of blending into both Caucasian and Cree environments to his benefit. He articulates that blending in as Caucasian allows doors to open, grants him privilege that would otherwise not be there if he couldn't blend in. Mary Ann feels that she has not had to deal with racism on a personal level because of her inability to be easily identified as Cree. While this on the surface is identified as her lack of identifiers that signal to others that she is Cree, this is not about her personal ability or inability. This is about structures within our society that have led to her individual categorization and subsequent disconnections perpetuated by this stereotype and external expectation. This also leads to struggles she has in public settings where

conversations and discussions are being had, either in peer groups or in university classrooms, about Indigenous experiences. She feels she constantly needs to provide context to her assertion of Cree identity, excusing her light skin, allowing people to concede that she does not fit their idea of Indigenous because she is of mixed-blood. This feeds into the internalization of shame and furthers marginalization of experiences. Mary Ann also shares how her experiences as a light-skinned Cree woman also allows her voice to be legitimized more easily perhaps than if she had darker skin. She carries a certain amount of privilege and she is searching for ways to use this to the advantage of Indigenous peoples.

Lawrence (2004) indicates that being unrecognizable as Indigenous by others due to preconceived notions about what it means to be Indigenous, for example, possessing darker skin, darker hair, and/or a particular bone structure, can be difficult for those whose features or lighter skin does not immediately indicate Indigenous personhood. Shawn indicated the tensions he felt at times when he is not recognizable in varying situations as Cree. Kelsey shared the impact of her lighter skin on connecting Cree identity into her sense of self and how an opportunity for reconnection opened up a flood of emotions, critical conversations and relationship building in her own family. Elders and mixed-blood participants each shared healing from an internalization of Memmi's (1965) mythical portrait, a distorted or unhealthy identity that has been adopted by collectives, and is translated into lateral violence and exclusion. Exclusion, in the form of lateral violence occurs when an individual internalizes a colonial mentality transferring this to the way that they are in relationship with community members (Palmater, 2011). Essentially exclusion exists when, as Indigenous peoples, we believe and apply the

mythical portrait, marginalizing members of our own community (Memmi, 1965; Palmater, 2011). This creates division, exclusion, separation, and trauma. Drake indicated that purposive and violent exclusion from his Cree community has made him question whether he actually belongs to any group. He shared that while his ancestral roots, and his own sense of connection was rooted in his community, at this point in time, there was not a reciprocal connection or 'claiming' by the same community. When the impacts of colonization ripple through an Indigenous community, the impact on individuals who are attempting to connect and find meaning in identity and belonging can create an emotional, traumatic, and damaging outcome.

Palmater (2011) outlines complex factors that have severed the links between kinship, family connections and identity. Within the conversations each of the participants and Elders worked to explain the way that their histories brought them to the places that they were today. The interplay between legislation, imposed identities, external judgments, stereotypes, racism, and lack of connection to community of origin impacted individual's ability to express an identity that felt authentic within themselves. Mihesuah (1998) explains that the development of positive identity for American Indian individuals of mixed ancestry is difficult and stressful particularly when there is a disconnection from cultural knowledges, and physical resemblance may not adhere to phenotypical norms of other members of the group. Mary Ann shared the disconnection she feels with community and how this has influenced her understanding of her self as a Cree woman. This was compounded with a sense of exclusion or insecurity without possession of the visual touchstones of Cree identity and disconnection from the ceremonies she participated in during her youth. Bonita Lawrence (2011) asks if there are

possible points of nation building for urban based mixed-blood individuals with tenuous links to land based community. Mary Ann and Kelsey both indicate that barriers such as skin colour may be intensified when coupled with a lack of land based community connection. Kelsey felt that reconnection with her Cree family's community of origin served to strengthen her sense of identity, connecting to family and land.

Participants' journeys highlight the varying processes of reclamation and assertion of Cree identity into a sense of self. Niezen (2009) indicates that reclamation of stories and history of one's ancestors is a method that can reconnect people with a sense of belonging and identity. Drake, Mary Ann, Kelsey, and Shawn each shared stories about ancestors and role models who influenced their understanding of their connection to their Cree identity. They spoke of a connection to their ancestors that allowed them to gain a sense of history and continuity. Drake felt connection in hearing stories of his great-grandfather who he had never met. Similarities are drawn between the two by influential people in Drake's life and this supports his understanding of who he is and his connection to Fox Lake Cree Nation. Shawn's connection to his grandfather supports his wellbeing as a mixed-blood Cree individual. When Shawn had questions, and was trying to make sense of his ancestry, he turned to his grandfather. Mary Ann's mother was influential in supporting her to explore her identity as a child, influenced by the journey of her Cree father and the stories that he shared about her great-grandmother. Mihesuah (1998) states that a catalyst often forces individuals to examine their understanding of their own identity, re-evaluating their place in the world around them. Kelsey also connected to the stories of her grandmother. She made a commitment to learn more about the history of her family after catalysts in her life opened her eyes to experiences and

stories that lay in front of her. As we build awareness about histories that have impacted our current reality, we also begin to understand relationships that have influenced the development of our identities. With this we also become aware of the necessary relationships that are yet to be built, or that need to be nurtured in order to move forward a strong and healthy identity.

Kerwin and Ponterotto (1995) indicate entry at school is a stage where children's awareness increases about the diversity of racial and ethnic groups, and a biracial child can begin to be questioned by peers about identity, necessitating children to verbalize and place themselves into categories. Mary Ann shares varying primary and secondary school experiences where her identity was highlighted either by herself, by others, or in contrast where it was not recognized and subsequently felt powerless when racism occurred. She shares her levels of comfort/discomfort in these situations. At this stage the impact of role models and the meaningful integration and celebration within classrooms and curriculum of diverse and positive experiences in the school overall. Shawn shares his experiences of early schooling where it was a more positive environment, although there were not many Cree role models within the system. He contrasts this with high school experience where expectations of poor achievement and lack of choice were coupled with lack of Cree role models.

Each of the participants expressed a vision for moving forward in the development and assertion of their identity. Relationship, spirituality, ceremonies, and connection were all shared as necessary to support wellbeing. Kim Anderson (2000) described this process as a reconstruction of self. This is a circular journey that is facilitated through reclamation of cultural traditions. There are four areas within this

journey. 1. Walking through resistance: determining who I am not. In this process individuals come to understand the histories that have been imposed upon their identities. They begin to sever ties that are incongruent with established and developing sense of self, free from that which has been imposed. 2. Reclaiming: where have I come from? Individuals begin to search, undertaking a reclaiming of their ancestral and communal roots. 3. Constructing: where am I going? Making sense of each of the previous two processes, individuals envision the ways in which their resisting and reclaiming can be moved towards a positive, relational construction of self. 4. Acting: what are my responsibilities? With the learning and healing journey that has been undertaken by individuals as they come to this stage, they work to incorporate this knowing into what it means to not only themselves, but also the collective. This is about relationships, with self and with others. In gaining these new knowledges, what responsibilities do they now need to maintain and put into action for themselves and for the relationships that they are accountable to? All four mixed-blood Cree participants expressed stories and emotions connected to the four levels of reclamation described by Anderson (2000). Stories centered particularly on participants' experiences in the first three stages of walking through resistance, reclaiming, and constructing. What is apparent through these stories is that the process described by Anderson is an iterative one, rather than linear. There is no clear delineation from one stage to the next, where a participant, once successful at the previous stage will never revisit it. Rather this is a matter of continual learning and growth, of taking in new experiences, new information, new knowledges, building new connections, nurturing relationships and applying it all to the vision of themselves in that moment, but also in the future. This is the acting, of picking up our responsibilities to

share our stories and our learning with those around us, to apply this to our lives and move forward in a healthy positive way. This is a process of resurgence and reclamation of self as whole, powerful, competent, and belonging.

Elder's stories connected Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin to creating and maintaining a healthy collective nested identity. Pamela Palmater (2011) makes a similar assertion to the stories shared by Cree Elders, Don Robinson, Wilfred Buck and Belinda VandenBroeck about Cree identity and the fundamental element of connection and relationship to understanding who we are. Connection is not entirely planted within bloodlines but is also nested within the relationship of the individual and the collective. This deep connection provides continuity that exists from our past ancestors, today with our families and communities and will continue into the future as generations who are yet to be (Palmater, 2011).

Don Robinson indicates that the foundation of Cree identity is connected to our consciousness of ourselves as whole beings, our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual are all connected. With this understanding we need to think deeply, about our lives and ourselves in relation to everything. It is crucial to know yourself, to explore and become aware of who you are as a being in relation. This can be facilitated through connection to ceremony, to land, to spirit.

Wilfred Buck shares that reconnection to Atchak (spirit) and the centrality of this connection is necessary in coming to know who we are. This can occur through reclaiming the names that we possessed before we come into this reality. As human beings it is natural for us to want to progress, to grow, and to want to know where we come from. This is our journey towards wellbeing, to connect to these roots.

Commitment towards awareness, acknowledgement and growth is necessary in our own personal healing journeys. Deeply intertwined is the centrality of spirit in all that we do. This provides a base from which to understand self and self in relation to all that is. We need to know and acknowledge who we are and where we come from. This is the place for healing to begin.

Belinda VandenBroeck shares experiences of connection, being raised in an environment of love with her granny in particular, and how this made her feel safe and like home. Early experiences supported her development and influenced her understanding of her identity. Intergenerational gatherings on the land in the summer time were foundational to her development as an Inninew woman. Belinda shared many examples of personal, familial and larger nation impacts of colonization, particularly highlighting internal hatred, a feeling of not liking who you are, shame, racism and judgments. She shares that it is necessary to the development of a strong identity, to know where we come from and who we are in relation to the world around us. This is an important healing journey that can take time, sometimes many, many years.

At the conclusion of this project it is clear that these stories are important to tell, important to hear, important to witness and engage with as a means towards building relationship and healing. In the same moment, it is apparent to me that this area of exploration is not resolved, has not provided any answers per say. There is still no clear way to name the experience itself, for example. In my title I use the term mixed-blood. This term has negative connotations for some and at the same moment is embraced and used by others. It was not an easy undertaking as a researcher to provide a name for an experience, and I sat for a long time considering what term to use, knowing that any term

I chose would not serve to express the diverse and varying realities that exist. Even though groups of people engage in and experience similar events, and histories, they may still have varying ways to express this identity in words. A lesson I have taken away is that the term mixed-blood does not adequately name such collective, and yet diverse experiences of mixed ancestry Cree identity. As a way of working through decolonization processes, as Laenui (2000) suggests, it is in the stage of dreaming that we must not rush the possibilities, we must not hurry through this stage to come to a place to action when there has not been space for visioning alternatives. Perhaps this is where the articulation of mixed-blood experience is at, fully within the stage of dreaming.

Assertion of identity in relation to rights, resources, power, and determination has pit Indigenous Nations across Canada against each other in varying methods. An outcome of government policies of assimilation can be evidenced in the exclusion of First Nations peoples from community, belonging and membership by perpetuating disconnections through lateral violence and competition. Alternatively, perhaps it will be through inclusive and relational rebuilding that membership and belonging, decolonization and transformation can be undertaken. Through this mobilization perhaps collectivity can be re-nurtured and re-membered. By refusing to accept control assumed by legislation created by colonial institutions and government, working to heal from these internalizations, and building awareness raising relationships within larger society, the impacts of colonization can be made transparent.

This project has allowed me a view into the enmeshment of government legislation and policy into the lives of individuals, families and Nations. It is impossible to deny the personal and intergenerational implications of colonization upon our lives, as

Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The implications filter into the ways that we interact with each other on personal and structural levels. It has implications in the field of social work as the profession interacts largely with Indigenous peoples as service users and increasingly as colleagues.

Implications for Social Work and Social Welfare Policy

The Canadian Association of Social Work defines social work as:

Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence.

Human rights and social justice are the philosophical underpinnings of social work practice. The uniqueness of social work practice is in the blend of some particular values, knowledge and skills, including the use of relationship as the basis of all interventions and respect for the client's choice and involvement.

In a socio-political-economic context which increasingly generates insecurity and social tensions, social workers play an important and essential role. (Retrieved June 24, 2013, <http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work>)

Policies of assimilation have impacted and continue to impact Indigenous peoples in Canada. Experiences shared have provided insight into the complexity of colonization upon identity and wellbeing. The structures of society, as reinforced through social work, are implicated in this. Colonization is the root cause of the multiple layers of symptoms experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is the primary cause of social issues. Developing and implementing policies that fail to recognize and address this reality perpetuates social work as a structure of colonization, with social workers leading the way. The profession of social work, as an institution, continues in many ways to support

structures of colonization in the lives of Indigenous individuals, families and communities.

Aboriginal leaders argue convincingly that the deplorable economic and social conditions of their peoples over generations can be attributed to social policy makers, social workers and other agents of the government, whose interventions have resulted in the erosion of Aboriginal cultural traditions and ways of living and thinking. (Mawhiney, 2001, p. 163)

Therefore it is the responsibility of the profession to begin to move beyond a superficial understanding of the experiences of Indigenous peoples.

Social work does not regularly advance concepts that correspond to the experiences and needs of Indigenous Peoples. It is rare to find terms and readings that openly require social work students to undertake a serious and systematic investigation of how terms such as invasion, genocide, murder, occupation, takeover, imperialism, colonialism, decolonization, dispossession, reparation, apology, responsibility, justice, white supremacy, suppression, land and resource rights, spirituality, Aboriginal title, sovereignty and monetary compensation apply to Indigenous peoples. (Yellow Bird & Gray, 2008, p.64)

Most of the service users that social workers come into contact with, design and implement programs and policies for identify as Indigenous. Social work perpetuates colonization and must begin to dismantle these structures and processes.

Social work was formed on a foundation of colonization and exclusion of the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and is, therefore, not significantly different in its assumptions and protections of the colonial status quo than other mainstream organizations or institutions that maintain the interests of the colonial state. (Yellow Bird & Gray, 2008, p. 64)

Decolonization within social work involves individual, organizational, structural and policy changes.

For example in the development of policy, social work must maintain a commitment and responsibility to understanding the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples' individual and communal identities. Social policy has intimately impacted belonging and membership.

By its very nature, rationalist policy is not holistic in its intent or application. Rather, it is grounded in a divisible world in which people are placed according to a range of implicit and explicit categories that are socially divisive. Gender, class, geography, age and other categories typify the taxonomy of the divisible citizen that policy seeks to serve in a world that is itself divided in myriad ways that are always distinct and separate from human existence. Dichotomous thinking marks policy development. (Kenny, 2004, p. 13)

The profession of social work is founded upon colonial relationships. If we are to move forward in social work to address these colonial relationships through processes of decolonization, it is critical that decolonizing occur at all levels in the profession.

Typically social programming developed out of First Nation social policy has been delivered in a top down manner where programs are “dropped” into First Nations as a “one size fits all” package that is intended to address a social problem such as substance abuse. Rather than [sic] addressing the root cause of the social issue it is a “band-aid” solution that often exasperates the social issue. (Hylton, 1999, p. 74)

One tenet of this commitment will be incorporation of the understanding of the impact of social policy and social programming on perpetuating the disconnection of Indigenous individuals from the ability to connect with the necessary relationships upon which to form a strong and healthy identity.

Aboriginal peoples are engaged in political and legal struggles, contesting the legitimacy of state sovereignty over the land but also the very definition of their membership in the political community. Moreover, a long history of policies denying the relevance of Aboriginal cultures has considerably weakened the cohesiveness and social sustainability of families and communities, creating a complex situation where a high level of *dependency* toward the state is combined with a *profound distrust* of that same state. (Papillon, & Cosentino, 2004, p. 1)

Coupled with awareness of the historical impact of social work in dismantling traditional systems of support and healing, social work education must examine the way that this mistrust continues and why. Social work practice and social policies continue to be delivered in a way that is paternalistic, based on the idea of the benevolent social worker. Social work education is foundational to this. Mawhiney (2001) argues:

We need to acknowledge the extent to which our learning in mainstream social work education programs is still based on dominantly held, middle-class, patriarchal and white values, traditions, assumptions, and ways of thinking – ways that are limited in their application to Aboriginal peoples and communities. (p. 163)

In 2002, the Status of Women Canada commissioned a paper to provide a document to support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers working in Aboriginal policy research that would encourage them to incorporate a holistic approach to this work (Kenny, 2004). Kenny (2004) asserts the necessity of Indigenous epistemology and knowledge validation as a means to ensure policy design and implementation serves the needs of those populations directly impacted. Kenny (2004) asserts that a holistic policy framework will ensure that voices and experiences are centered:

A holistic approach to Aboriginal policy research that positions women in the centre of the design and implementation of policy will put policy research on the right path toward a humane and just society for Aboriginal peoples, because as this paper has indicated a holistic approach reflects the values and practices of Aboriginal societies. In a holistic approach, the fragmentation of life through separating and alienating policy processes will be bound back together with integrity. This integrity will facilitate ongoing healing for Aboriginal people that demonstrates the possibility that we can all learn from history. And we can all change our ways in the face of the roles forced upon us through historical events. Research can be a productive arena in which to relinquish the roles of colonizer and victim as a level playing field emerges between research partners through responsible and respectful research practice. (p. 37)

Research and subsequent policy development based upon this research must begin with a thorough understanding of the historical experiences of Aboriginal peoples. Researchers must also understand Aboriginal peoples experience with research, their current situations, and visions for the future (Kenny, 2004).

The impact of colonization upon the relationships of parents, grandparents and community have intergenerationally compounded upon children searching for the answer

to the question, “who am I?” This seems to be a fundamental and simple exploration, however, in many cases within the field of social work and human development, it is precisely this question that is at the root of searching. Exploration of identity, the essence of being, in particular for First Nation peoples and successive generations of children and grandchildren, is a critical stage in healing and decolonization.

Social work was founded upon ‘helping those less fortunate’, but there existed and still exists within Indigenous nations in Canada ways of knowing, being, and doing that can address the impacts of colonization and work to reconnect. Yellow Bird and Gray (2008) highlight that:

The first step in changing the language of social work is to acknowledge the Eurocentric history of its development. Long before colonizing populations passively or calculatedly invaded the territories and disrupted the lives of Indigenous Peoples in different parts of the world, there existed innovative formal and informal systems of support, welfare, and helping that were developed and maintained by various Indigenous peoples, nations, confederacies, tribes, villages, clans, societies and families. (p. 62)

Demonstrated through the conversations with Cree Elders is that these processes exist. The connection between methods for healing, decolonization and resurgence are rooted within our Elders, connection for mixed-blood individuals who are working through reclamation can begin to undo the impacts of policies, structures and institutions that have severed connection and belonging through these connections.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for further research are rooted at two levels. The first is the reconnection of mixed-blood Cree individuals with Cree Elders and the possibility for healing and decolonization to occur at this point of connection. Second, in order to

address the implications of social work, as a continuing institution of colonization, there must be a dismantling of the foundations upon which the profession is built.

Stories and experiences shared in this project have only begun to explicate the implications of colonization and the resulting social policies upon identities of mixed-blood Cree individuals. As shared by Cree Elders, there are many points of reflection and growth provided through the sharing of lived experiences and learning the history of our families and Indigenous peoples in Canada. Cree Elders hold specific knowledges into the development of a healthy collective Cree identity. Critical to experiences of healing and decolonization is the connection of the knowledges to those who are working to disentangle themselves from a colonial mentality. The facilitation of this process has not been explored in the area of identity development and would be an important addition to the knowledge base of Indigenous social work.

There are considerable points of intervention for a decolonizing process to occur within social work education, practice, research, evaluation and social policy development. This recommendation will focus on the need for research and development into a new framework for social policy. Developments have been made in social work practice, education, and research, although in my opinion, there are vast expanses left to travel in these areas. For example, social policy from an Indigenous foundation is sorely lacking within social work. The development of social policy frameworks must occur by Indigenous peoples, those directly impacted by the policies themselves, facilitated through Indigenous social workers who have insight into the profession and structures. This will begin to address Indigenous peoples' experiences with colonization as a starting point. Development of health frameworks founded upon Indigenous understandings is an

area where social determinants and inclusion of a holistic foundation have occurred.

Lessons may be learned from this development in particular for social work. For example, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) have developed and presented a framework that has articulated a Gender Balanced Approach (GBA). Inherent values expressed through this policy and program analytical framework are:

Holism: Policies will recognize the whole person, recognizing the relationship of spiritual, emotional, mental and physical health within the individual and the importance of family and community

Voice: First Nations will be given a voice in decision making and opportunities to participate in processes that supports sustainable communities

Equity: Sustainable First Nations communities should be provided services and resources to compensate for historical and social injustices, aligned with Aboriginal and Treaty rights. Outcomes achieved should be in line with those available for other Canadians. Equity leads to Equality

Cultural Diversity: Sustainable First Nations communities must be founded on a respect for cultural diversity. Cultural diversity is strongly linked to Equity

Control: Sustainable First Nations communities should be controlled by First Nations themselves, not imposed from the outside

Cultural Identity: Services and policies will recognize and affirm the cultural identity of First Nations. (AFN, 2007, as cited in Reading, Kmetz & Gideon, 2007, pp. 28-29)

Community is at the core of the model with the following key characteristics

incorporated: 1. The Medicine Wheel: Spiritual, Physical, Emotional and Mental; 2.

Cycles of the life space: child youth, adult, elder; 3. Key dimensions of First Nations self-

government: self-government/jurisdiction, fiscal relationships/accountability, collective and individual rights, capacity/negotiations, and social determinants of health; and, 4.

Components of social capital: bonding, bridging, linkage. This provides an example of

the complexities and considerations that must be undertaken within the development of such a framework.

Decolonization within social work must be undertaken. It is time that we not only acknowledge the history of the profession in harming Indigenous peoples, but that this continues to be perpetuated. Decolonization involves more than acknowledgement for past wrongs; it signifies a commitment for moving forward to dismantle the structures and policies that continue to exist. Of significant importance is that the liberation of Indigenous peoples is not something that will be given or gifted by social work to those who continue to be oppressed: but that it remains a matter of co-liberation. Social work cannot “save” the Indian, it must save itself from the colonial foundations upon which it was built and remains.

Within this section I have provided two key areas based on the findings of my project that directly relate to the decolonization of social work. It is necessary to hear, to witness, to engage with the stories of mixed-blood Cree individuals; they hold valuable knowledge related to healing and decolonizing at personal, family and community levels. In connecting with Cree ways of knowing, being, and doing, social work can create spaces for these connections to occur. Social workers can learn from these experiences, understanding the vast tentacles of colonization’s reach into today, to the urgency in which health and wellbeing must be addressed in a new way. Finally, to move into structural change, social work must concede, that as an institution, the way that social work is done today is not be what is needed from Indigenous perspectives. Part of this concession is supporting the development of social policy from Indigenous foundations

that incorporate knowledges rooted in Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as expressed by participants and supported and asserted by the literature.

Concluding Remarks

Resistance has protected identity, has protected our languages, and our traditions. People have not completely assimilated and disassociated from these identities into mainstream society. How and why resistance is alive is an important question to offer insight into strengthening these aspects to move healthy collective identity forward.

The work that I do, within my role as a student, as a teacher, as a mother, as an aunt, as a daughter – this work is deeply intimate and personal. It is all connected to my own healing journey with identity, belonging, membership, connection, meaning, and decolonization. It is about finding my way home and about creating change. (Rowe, November 2012)

As I stated earlier, McIvor (2010) suggests while this is my unique story, this is also a generational story of us who have lost our language, feel lost without our connections to land, without our connections to the teachings of our grandmothers, and feel, because of these disconnections, we may not have something important to offer. But in spite of, or perhaps because of this, we have not lost hope and have begun to re-member these connections, to remember, in fact, we do have something important to offer.

This coming home for me (I have called it this before, my journey home, coming home) was about physically being in a space that has created me – that formed a great deal of my memories and has held many pieces of me that need to be healed. Pieces of me that are in the process of healing and those that are still, unbeknownst to me, needing to be addressed. I needed to be in a space that connected me to those pieces that brought me right back into the thick of my unresolved childhood. Those pieces that held the beautiful, rich, loving memories as well as those pieces that held the darkest, desperate experiences that still sit within my soul.

I am not sure that without this move I would have even allowed myself to look inside – to create the opportunity for self-reflection, digging down into my soul. I am not sure that this was intentional either. I didn't set out from Alberta with my family clearly stating that this was going to be a healing journey for me. I didn't

set this in my mind. What I have come to reflect upon four years later as I have journeyed to this thesis topic in particular is that everything was setting the stage to allow me to do my important healing. There was no way I could move forward without addressing this. I had to physically be on the land that made me – here in Winnipeg and in Gillam as well. I think that is why I also have a strong urge to go home to Edmonton as well. There is something there that is calling me to remember, to work through.

So here I am in the midst and thick of a messy and complex challenge. An inner challenge that I am only through fleeting moments able to articulate in a way that anyone else other than me would be able to understand. But really the point is that I am only partially able to comprehend this journey at the best of times. (Rowe, June 2011)

I began my journey into adulthood questioning where I fit within this world. I worried that I didn't look, sound or act enough like a Cree woman to be seen as 'authentic' and that I was an imposter within my own home of Fox Lake Cree Nation. I began my own process of reclamation (Anderson, 2000), and I have repeatedly walked through all four iterative levels of: 1. Walking through resistance, 2. Reclaiming, 3. Constructing, and, 4. Acting. This research is one of the ways that I have acted, and it was based on my reflection and understanding of my own healing, decolonization and resurgence. I asked in one of my journal entries what I should be called myself, in order to honour all of the relationships that have formed me. I realize now, that for me, I can say that I am a Muskego Inninew Iskwew of mixed ancestry and this is what I feel in my heart. This does not negate that I have been influenced by strong women in my life who are important to who I am today. I am who I am because of these relationships. I have been supported to undertake this journey to connect with my own essence because of these relationships.

The process of sitting with and listening to the stories shared by Don Robinson, Wilfred Buck, Belinda VandenBroeck, Kelsey, Mary Ann, Drake, and Shawn has been a

powerful experience for me. Sitting in deep reflection and meaning making has influenced my understanding of my own experiences. Such is the mechanism of stories. Through raising my voice I was able to connect with others who also have put forward their own voices, to express both a collective and unique experience. This is the beauty and power of a story.

So what are the implications of this project? What does it mean that the following stories are shared, that intimate pieces of self are opened up for examination and exploration? This project is about relationship: relationship described within the interviews, relationship described by mixed-blood participants and Cree Elders, relationship between myself and the participants, relationship between myself, my story and their stories, and relationship between you, the reader, and this work. It is also about the relationship you have with these stories, stories of humanity and connection, of fear and disconnection, of insecurities and questioning, all opened up raw. These stories are gifts from the experiential journeys of one individual to others. These gifts are meant to teach us, to allow for us to reflect, to learn and to expand our awareness about the responsibilities we hold with Indigenous peoples in Canada. It is through these relationships, the sharing of personal and ancestral stories, that we can come to know the “other” that has been constructed, as nothing more and nothing less than precisely human. It begins to shed the blinders that have been placed upon us through socialization that allow groups of people to be subjected to external labeling and stereotyping and to get to the core of the impact this has had. This allows us to come to understand that through opening ourselves to the possibility of relational interactions, we are creating spaces for coming to know in a good way.

Through this I feel I was given a great opportunity and a gift. Knowledges that I have incorporated into my thesis have also become a current within my own healing and growth. I am honoured to have shared these experiences with each of the Elders and individuals. Through their sharing they have effectively impacted who I am as a woman, mother, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, niece and granddaughter. The healing journey that I have undertaken as a necessary part of my own personal decolonization also touches everyone in my life. It impacts the actions that I take and the way that I choose to be in relationship with everything around me. I am mindful of my thoughts, my words, my actions and the way that I communicate and attend to my responsibilities to my relationships daily. Ekosi.

Appendix A

Mixed-blood Indigenous Participant Interview Guide:

1. Can you share with me stories about your Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds
Probes:
 - Can you share stories about when did you became more aware of these backgrounds
 - What relationships in your life have influenced this
 - What stories can you share about experiences that supported your exploration of these backgrounds
 - What stories can you share about barriers to your exploration of these backgrounds
 - What observations have you made about possessing both backgrounds

2. How have the ways that you identify in different settings evolved?
Probes:
 - How have you identified yourself in the past
 - How do you identify now
 - What influences your understanding of your identity
 - What relationships in your life have influenced this
 - What experiences stand out for you
 - Have you experienced any difficulties in your assertion of this
 - What has supported your understanding
 - What have been your reactions and actions as a result of barriers

3. How is your identity connected to your overall wellbeing
Probes:
 - What observations have you made about wellbeing and your identity
 - Are there areas that would support your feelings of belonging and connection
 - What/who/where has influenced your understanding of who you are in relation to the world around you

Appendix B

Elders Interview Guide

1. What are the ways we come to know who we are?
2. Can you share with me your understanding of Niwâkomâkanak
3. How can this help mixed-blood peoples understand their identity?
4. Can you share with me your understanding of Mino-pimatisiwin
5. How can this help mixed-blood peoples understand their identity?
6. How can a mixed-blood person who has been disconnected from their land, community, languages and stories of their ancestors strengthen their identity?

Appendix C

Consent Form

Study Title: Kikiskisin Ná: Do you remember? Utilizing Indigenous methodologies to understand the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in identity re-membering

Principal Investigator: Gladys Rowe, Masters Student,
Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
(204) 918-3233, Gladys.Rowe@ad.umanitoba.ca

Research Advisor: Dr. Michael Hart, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work
(204) 474-9237, Michael.Hart@ad.umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. **Participation is voluntary and declining to participate will have no negative results.** Please feel free to take your time to read or have this information read to you carefully so that all the information is clear. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples including the way in which people discover, seek out and come to understand themselves in relation to their identities.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your experiences as an individual who possesses both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry. This includes the way in which your experiences have impacted the development and reclamation of your identities and the relationships that have been supportive or un-supportive in these processes. You will be encouraged to share your story and experiences in whatever manner is most comfortable for you. Throughout the interview, you will be encouraged to direct the discussion and provide information you feel is important to better understand your experiences as a mixed-blood Indigenous person.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If you do not consent to being recorded, the researcher will take notes.

Depending on how much you wish to participate, the interview can take place over several sessions and will be gauged by your decision to share your stories and experiences. At the end of each session you can indicate whether more time is needed and we can schedule another interview. Alternately, if after the session you feel you have more to share you can call me at 204-918-3233 or email me at Gladys.Rowe@ad.umanitoba.ca in order to arrange another meeting.

Benefits

While recognizing the importance of reciprocity in Indigenous communities, the purpose of this study is not based on the intent to provide you with direct benefit as an individual. This research is a step forward towards supporting creating space and voice of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples experiences.

Comfort and Discomfort

Topics discussed in this project could potentially cause emotional distress, in the event that you find any aspect of the study upsetting, during or after our conversations, we will provide you with contact information for relevant services, such as counseling services available in the community, or assist you to find an Elder with whom you can connect for support.

Please note that sharing one's experiences with mixed-blood Indigenous identities carries with it the risk of experiencing emotional distress. With this possibility in mind, a list of counseling resources has been attached to this consent form for your assistance. There may be some direct benefits to you in terms of having the opportunity to describe to a concerned listener experiences that you may have found distressing. More long-term, you will be contributing to a more informed understanding of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples experiences in Canada.

Confidentiality

Unless otherwise indicated by you, your responses in this study will be held as confidential by the researcher. Only myself, my research advisor and (possibly) the U of M Research Quality Assurance Office will have access to the research records. The digital recorded conversations will be stored on a computer requiring a password for access to the files. This recording will be transcribed by myself, in which case the electronic copy of the transcriptions will be stored on a computer requiring a password for access to the files. The computer will be stored in a locked location. The paper transcripts of the conversations will be stored in a locked cabinet within a locked location at the University of Manitoba. The digital recordings and transcripts will be identified by an arbitrary number. Your identifying information and assigned arbitrary number will be kept on paper copy in a locked filing cabinet separate from the paper transcriptions. It will also be kept separate from the digital recording and electronic transcripts. Unless otherwise directed by the group, this identifying information and any confidential data will be stored for up to one year after the publication of the results with data being destroyed on or before August 31, 2014.

If you wish to be identified as a participant in this study and would like to have your responses noted as coming from you, then I will follow your preference.

Accuracy

When all of the sessions are complete, as indicated by you letting me know that there are no more stories or experiences that you would like to share in relation to the research topic I will provide you with a draft written or electronic copy of the transcript of your interview sessions.

Once you have received these I will ask you to review the transcript to ensure that I have captured the ideas you shared in a way that reflects your experiences. At this point you can add, modify or delete aspects of the transcripts. This can occur either through oral or written feedback by contacting me through telephone or email. Once you have had a week with the transcripts I will follow up through email or telephone call to ask about any changes.

Additionally, once I have written findings, I will provide you an electronic or written copy of the findings of your interview where you will also have an opportunity to make any changes to your contribution. This can occur either through oral or written feedback by contacting me through telephone or email. Once you have had a week with the transcripts I will follow up through email or telephone call to ask about any changes.

Sharing the Results

Results from this study will be disseminated through presentations at scholarly conferences, workshops and through publication in academic journals. At no time will I share any individual responses that could identify you as a participant unless you direct me to make your identity known.

Prior to any dissemination or publication I will follow the process identified by you that will ensure the publication reflects your perspectives or includes your direct commentary if it does not. I will also ask if you wish to participate in this way, I will discuss the respective roles and contributions of all participating authors/contributors and the estimates of time required.

Providing Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibilities. **You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to skip, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

Quality Assurance

The University of Manitoba Research Quality Assurance Office may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

Questions

This research has been approved by the University of Manitoba Psychology/Social Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature Date

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature Date

Confidentiality Preference:

Please check one of the following options:

I want to be identified by name as a participant and have my responses attributed to me whenever possible.

I want my contributions to remain confidential. The alias I will choose to be identified by in the reporting of the project is: _____

Participant's Signature Date

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Copies of Reports:

Please check one of the following options:

I want to receive a hard copy of the final report mailed to me at the address below

I want to receive an electronic copy of the final report emailed to me at the address below

I do not want to receive any copy of the final report

Mailing Address:

Email Address:

Appendix D

Consent Form

Study Title: Kikiskisin Ná: Do you remember? Utilizing Indigenous methodologies to understand the experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples in identity re-membering

Principal Investigator: Gladys Rowe, Masters Student,
Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba
(204) 918-3233, Gladys.Rowe@ad.umanitoba.ca

Research Advisor: Dr. Michael Hart, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work
(204) 474-9237, Michael.Hart@ad.umanitoba.ca

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. **Participation is voluntary and declining to participate will have no negative results.** Please feel free to take your time to read or have this information read to you carefully so that all the information is clear. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better experiences of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples including the way in which people discover, seek out and come to understand themselves in relation to their identities.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your understanding of Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin as a part of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples ability to have a strong understanding of who they are. As a traditional knowledge keeper I will ask how this can help people to understand their identity. Your participation would involve meeting with me for a conversation about these experiences. I will ask about the meaning of Niwâkomâkanak (all my relations) and how this influences a person to become rooted in their understanding of who they are. I will ask you to share stories of your understanding about mino-pimatisiwin and how a strong identity helps people to move towards this.

You will be encouraged to share these teachings in whatever manner that is most comfortable for you. Throughout the interview, you will be encouraged to direct the discussion and provide information you feel is important to better understand how a mixed-blood Indigenous person can re-connect with a strong sense of self.

With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded. If you do not consent to being recorded, the researcher will take notes.

Depending on how much you wish to participate, the interview can take place over several sessions and will be gauged by your decision to share your stories and experiences. At the end of each session you can indicate whether more time is needed and we can schedule another interview. Alternately, if after the session you feel you have more to share you can call me at 204-918-3233 or email me at Gladys.Rowe@ad.umanitoba.ca in order to arrange another meeting.

Benefits

While recognizing the importance of reciprocity in Indigenous communities, the purpose of this study is not based on the intent to provide you with direct benefit as an individual. This research is a step forward towards supporting creating space and voice of mixed-blood Indigenous peoples experiences towards healing.

Comfort and Discomfort

Topics discussed in this project could potentially cause emotional distress, in the event that you find any aspect of the study upsetting, during or after our conversations, we will provide you with contact information for relevant services, such as counseling services available in the community, or assist you to find an Elder with whom you can connect for support.

Please note that sharing stories about identities carries with it the risk of experiencing emotional distress. With this possibility in mind, a list of counseling resources has been attached to this consent form for your assistance. There may be some direct benefits to you in terms of having the opportunity to describe to a concerned listener experiences that you may have found distressing. More long-term, you will be contributing to a more informed understanding of how traditional stories and reconnecting with understandings of Niwâkomâkanak and mino-pimatisiwin can help to heal mixed-blood Indigenous peoples experiences in Canada.

Confidentiality

Unless otherwise indicated by you, your responses in this study will be held as confidential by the researcher. Only myself, my research advisor and (possibly) the U of M Research Quality Assurance Office will have access to the research records. The digital recorded conversations will be stored on a computer requiring a password for access to the files. This recording will be transcribed by myself, in which case the electronic copy of the transcriptions will be stored on a computer requiring a password for access to the files. The computer will be stored in a locked location. The paper transcripts of the conversations will be stored in a locked cabinet within a locked location at the University of Manitoba. The digital recordings and transcripts will be identified by an arbitrary number. Your identifying information and assigned arbitrary number will be kept on paper copy in a locked filing cabinet separate from the paper transcriptions. It will also be kept separate from the digital recording and electronic transcripts. Unless otherwise directed by the group, this identifying information and any confidential data will be stored for up to one year after the publication of the results with data being destroyed on or before August 31, 2014.

If you wish to be identified as a participant in this study and would like to have your responses noted as coming from you, then I will follow your preference.

Accuracy

When all of the sessions are complete, as indicated by you letting me know that there are no more stories or experiences that you would like to share in relation to the research topic I will provide you with a draft written or electronic copy of the transcript of your interview sessions.

Once you have received these I will ask you to review the transcript to ensure that I have captured the ideas you shared in a way that reflects your experiences. At this point you can add, modify or delete aspects of the transcripts. This can occur either through oral or written feedback by contacting me through telephone or email. Once you have had a week with the transcripts I will follow up through email or telephone call to ask about any changes.

Additionally, once I have written findings, I will provide you an electronic or written copy of the findings of your interview where you will also have an opportunity to make any changes to your contribution. This can occur either through oral or written feedback by contacting me through telephone or email. Once you have had a week with the transcripts I will follow up through email or telephone call to ask about any changes.

Sharing the Results

Results from this study will be disseminated through presentations at scholarly conferences, workshops and through publication in academic journals. At no time will I share any individual responses that could identify you as a participant unless you direct me to make your identity known.

Prior to any dissemination or publication I will follow the process identified by you that will ensure the publication reflects your perspectives or includes your direct commentary if it does not. I will also ask if you wish to participate in this way, I will discuss the respective roles and contributions of all participating authors/contributors and the estimates of time required.

Providing Consent

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher from her legal and professional responsibilities. **You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to skip, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.**

Quality Assurance

The University of Manitoba Research Quality Assurance Office may look at your research records to see that the research is being done in a safe and proper way.

Questions

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